

Redefining the workplace: The Role of Organizational Culture in Shaping the Gender Pay Gap

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Abstract

This research investigates the influence of organizational culture on the gender pay gap through a systematic review of recent academic literature, complemented by two practitioner interviews. It is guided by the central research question: “What is the role of organizational culture in shaping the gender pay gap in the workplace?” The findings demonstrate that organizational culture is a multidimensional concept, encompassing both formal structures, such as diversity policies and governance and informal norms including expectations around overwork, visibility and masculine-coded leadership traits. This research distinguished between two dimensions of organizational culture: the meso-level and the micro-level. Meso-level cultures, characterized by inclusive policies and accountability structures, are often linked to narrower gender pay gaps. Micro-level informal dynamics can undermine these efforts by reinforcing unequal practices in everyday interactions. Drawing on Gendered Organization Theory and Social Role Theory, this study demonstrates how embedded gender norms shape evaluation, promotion and compensation practices that are key mechanisms through which the gender pay gap is maintained. Although the gender pay gap is widely acknowledged as a persistent issue across sectors, its ongoing existence within organizations is often driven by implicit cultural norms, structural dynamics and leadership behaviours that influence how value and reward are assigned. Interviews conducted within the hospitality and public sectors further support the literature, highlighting a disconnect between implemented formal equality policies and daily workplace experiences by employees. Ultimately, this research argues that meaningful progress in closing the gender pay gap requires aligning structural policies with everyday cultural practices and addressing both explicit and implicit biases within organizations.

Keywords: Gender pay gap, organizational culture, gender inequality, informal norms, workplace policy, structural discrimination

How Organizational Culture shapes the Gender Pay Gap in the Workplace

Over the past decades, gender inequality in the workplace has remained a persistent challenge despite significant advancements in education and workforce participation (Wei & Zhu, 2024). Women earn university degrees at equal or higher rates than men and consistently demonstrate strong academic performance (McDaniel, 2009). However, these educational achievements have not translated into equal opportunities in the labour market, because women continue to face barriers in wage equality (Thelma & Ngulube, 2024).

The gender pay gap refers to the persistent inequality in average earnings between men and women, despite having similar levels of education, work experience and occupation (Blau & Kahn, 2016). This inequality in earnings over time has led to bigger societal problems, for instance, reduced economic independence for women (Reshi & Sudha, 2023), increased risk of poverty among single mothers (Kramer et al., 2015) and the underutilization of female talent in leadership positions (Cohen & Huffman, 2007). A significant portion of the gap cannot be explained by measurable factors (e.g. education, experience and job level), suggesting the influence of discrimination and gendered organizational practices (Schneider et al., 2019). In the Netherlands, for instance, the gender pay gap in the business sector was 16.4% in 2022, even after adjusting for relevant job and employee characteristics (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek [CBS], 2023).

When focussing on the organizational factors, organizational culture plays a crucial role in maintaining gender disparities (Hu, 2024). Organizational culture is the set of shared beliefs and values that a group of employees or colleagues develops over time, as it learns how to deal with challenges both inside the group and in the outside world. When these ways of thinking and behaving prove successful, they become accepted as the right way to act and are passed on to new members (Shein, 2010). Organizational cultures that are predominantly male-oriented can disadvantage women by fostering institutional discrimination and sexist decision-making,

particularly in HR practices (Stamarski & Hing, 2015). As a result, women may be overlooked for promotions and high-paying roles, even when they have similar qualifications or performance levels. Furthermore, organizational cultures that support silence around pay transparency can reinforce existing inequalities as well, as biased pay-setting practices remain unchallenged (Castilla, 2015). In this way, organizational culture can indirectly but powerfully sustain the gender pay gap over time.

Despite decades of research examining the gender pay gap, this disparity persists across the globe (Auspurg et al., 2017; Boll & Lagemann, 2019). Numerous studies have demonstrated how organizational norms and gendered assumptions influence pay-setting practices, particularly within male-oriented workplace cultures (Stamarski & Hing, 2015; Castilla, 2015; Zimmermann and Collischon, 2023; Keller et al., 2021; Sánchez-Mira et al., 2020). Nevertheless, the gender pay gap remains evident in various countries, illustrating that it is a systemic and enduring issue that needs further research. In the United States, for instance, women earned approximately 76 cents for every dollar earned by men between 2017 and 2019 (U.S. Department of Labor, 2023). In Russia, the unadjusted gender pay gap stood at 23.7% in 2021, meaning women earned nearly a quarter less per hour than their male counterparts (Gender Pay Gap Russia| Statista, 2025). In China, although direct data on the national wage gap is limited, World Bank gender indicators highlight continued economic inequality for women in employment participation and income levels (World Bank, 2023). Within the European Union, the gender pay gap remains a concern despite positive developments in workforce participation and education. In the Netherlands, for example, the average gap narrowed to 12.7% in 2022, yet the country still ranks only mid-tier in the EU on this indicator (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek [CBS], 2023). This data highlights the persistence of unequal pay between men and women even with the implementation of a wide range of equality policies, such as mandatory pay reporting, diversity training and gender mainstreaming

strategies (Abudy et al., 2022; Ly-Le, 2022; Parken & Ashworth, 2018). Research shows that many of these interventions fail to address deeper structural and cultural roots of inequality, particularly those embedded in everyday organizational practices and informal norms (Castilla, 2015; Stamarski & Hing, 2015). Moreover, even well-intentioned policies frequently suffer from symbolic implementation, lacking the enforcement mechanisms or organizational commitment necessary to produce long-term change (Van der Lippe et al., 2018; Lindsay, 2020). This disconnect between policy and practice helps explain why, despite decades of academic attention and policy reform, the gender pay gap continues to persist.

Having established the persistence of the gender pay gap and reviewed prior literature on how organizational culture can reinforce such disparities, this paper aims to synthesize existing research on the relationship between organizational culture and the gender pay gap. This research contributes to the growing body of knowledge on organizational diversity and inclusion, by offering a deeper understanding of how organizational culture, both in its formal policies and informal norms, shapes the persistence of the gender pay gap. It also provides valuable insights into how organizations can create more equitable environments for women to be monetarily as equally valued as men, when holding similar stances such as educational level or work experience. This research will provide new insight into the way organizational culture can shape the gender pay gap and how organizations can address this through both structural measures, such as transparent pay frameworks and cultural changes. The following research question has been formulated to guide the investigation: “What is the role of organizational culture in shaping the gender pay gap in the workplace?” To answer this question, a systematic literature review will be conducted to minimize bias and ensure a thorough exploration of the topic. By using explicit and replicable methods for selecting, analysing and synthesizing studies, this approach reduces common forms of bias, such as selection bias and confirmation bias, resulting in more reliable findings that can better inform both academic understanding and

organizational decision-making (Krupinski, 2019). The remainder of this paper outlines the existing literature on organizational culture and the gender pay gap, followed by the methodology and findings of the systematic review, and concludes with a reflection on the research outcome.

2. Theoretical Framework

The following section introduces the key concepts central to this study, namely organizational culture and the gender pay gap and discusses relevant theories that help explain their relationship.

2.1 Organizational Culture

Organizational culture is a foundational concept in the study of organizations and has been used to explain a wide range of phenomena including employee behaviour, leadership styles, innovation and organizational performance (Alvesson, 2013; Schein, 2010). At its core, organizational culture refers to the shared system of meaning that shapes how people act and interact within an organization. It encompasses both the tangible and intangible elements of organizational life, including values, norms, assumptions, rituals, language and symbols that collectively guide behaviour (Alvesson, 2013). Hofstede et al. (1990, p. 286) define organizational culture as “holistic, historically determined and socially constructed system of shared meanings and practices. It is characterized by its intangible ‘soft’ nature and is inherently difficult to change”, emphasizing how shared mental models influence member behaviours. Similarly, Martins and Terblanche (2003) stress culture’s role in shaping organizational control and innovation through shared meaning. Deal and Kennedy (1982, p. 4) focus on visible practices, describing culture as “the way we do things around here”.

The most comprehensive definition is offered by Schein (2010, p. 18), who conceptualizes organizational culture as “a pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, which has worked

well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems”. Schein’s three levels of organizational culture model distinguishes between three levels of culture: artifacts (visible elements such as dress codes, office layout and rituals), espoused values (the organization’s declared beliefs and strategies), and basic underlying assumptions (deep-seated beliefs that are taken for granted and often unconscious) (Schein, 2010). This framework provides a useful structure for understanding how culture influences organizational life. This systematic review adopts Schein’s definition of organizational culture for its analytical depth and applicability to long-term structural phenomena such as gender inequality.

2.1.2 The Gender Pay Gap

The gender pay gap refers to the persistent disparity in earnings between men and women, which remains even after accounting for human capital factors such as education, experience and occupation. This conceptualization, used throughout this review, is derived from Blau and Kahn’s (2016) broader analysis of gender wage disparities, as it encompasses both measurable and unexplained components of the gap. England (2005) emphasizes that a portion of the gender pay gap remains unexplained, pointing to the influence of implicit bias and discrimination. Similarly, Rubery and Grimshaw (2015) argue that pay structures and evaluation systems are embedded in institutional norms that systematically undervalue female-dominated roles. To provide a standardized international perspective, the OECD (2022) defines the unadjusted gender pay gap as the difference in median earnings between men and women relative to men’s earnings. In addition to these aggregate measures, scholars have identified more nuanced patterns of inequality specifically vertical and horizontal dimensions. These dimensions are captured in the concepts of the glass ceiling and the sticky floor. The glass ceiling refers to invisible barriers that prevent women from advancing into top-paying senior positions, despite possessing equal qualifications (Cotter et al., 2001). Conversely, the sticky

floor describes the overrepresentation of women in low-wage, low-mobility roles that offer limited opportunities for progression (Chi & Li, 2007). These mechanisms intensify the gender pay gap by constraining upward mobility and restricting access to higher earnings. Therefore, understanding the gender pay gap requires not only a focus on average differences but also a deeper examination of how gender shapes access to opportunity across organizational hierarchies.

Many researchers have highlighted the role of organizational culture in either perpetuating or mitigating the gender pay gap (Zimmermann & Collischon, 2023; Keller et al., 2021; Sánchez-Mira et al., 2020). Cultures that foster transparency, equity and inclusion tend to reduce gender-based disparities, whereas those grounded in opacity and traditional gender norms often reinforce them (Schein, 2010). Ackers's (2006) concept of "inequality regimes" underscores how organizational processes are frequently structured around male norms, embedding gender hierarchies in daily workplace practices. For instance, cultures that reward long or inflexible working hours may inadvertently disadvantage women, who are more likely to have caregiving responsibilities (Williams, 2000). Castilla and Benard (2010) further demonstrate that even organizations committed to meritocracy can display gender bias in pay decisions when evaluations are informal or subjective.

Thus, the gender pay gap cannot be viewed in isolation from the organizational culture in which it exists. A comprehensive understanding of pay inequality requires critical attention to the underlying values, norms and leadership expectations that shape compensation systems within the workplace. So for this systematic review, the gender pay gap will be defined following Blau and Kahn (2016), as this conceptualization captures both measurable and unexplained differences, offering a framework to examine structural and cultural contributors within organizations.

2.2.1 Gendered Organization Theory

Gendered Organization Theory, first proposed by Acker (1990), argues that organizations are not gender-neutral but are structured in ways that systematically privilege men and masculine norms. According to Acker, this gendering occurs through five interrelated processes: job divisions, symbols, interactions, internal mental work and organizational logic. These processes are embedded in everyday organizational practices and influence how work is structured, evaluated and rewarded. As a result, female-dominated jobs are often systematically devalued, even when they require skills equivalent to those in male-dominated roles (Cohen & Huffman, 2003). Furthermore, evaluative processes tend to favour traditionally masculine behaviours, such as assertiveness or independence, which can disadvantage women in promotions or salary negotiations (Castilla, 2008). In this way, Gendered Organization Theory highlights how organizational culture embodies and reinforces gendered assumptions, shaping both formal reward systems and informal decision-making practices. Consequently, these embedded norms and structures contribute to the persistence of the gender pay gap by normalizing unequal treatment and institutionalizing bias in ways that are often subtle, implicit and resistant to change (Sampson, 2020).

2.2.2 Social Role Theory

Social Role Theory (Eagly & Wood, 1991) explains gender differences in workplace outcomes as the product of culturally constructed expectations regarding appropriate roles for men and women. These expectations produce a persistent dichotomy: women are expected to embody communal traits such as nurturing, cooperation and empathy, while men are associated with agentic traits like assertiveness, dominance and independence (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Because leadership and high-paying positions are often aligned with agentic qualities, women are frequently perceived as less competent or less suitable for these roles (Koenig et al., 2011; Cejka & Eagly, 1999). Moreover, when women adopt agentic behaviours in an effort to conform to leadership expectations, they often face social penalties like being judged as

abrasive, unlikable or overly aggressive (Rudman & Glick, 2001; Heilman & Okimoto, 2007). These gendered stereotypes are reinforced and perpetuated by organizational culture, influencing how individuals are evaluated assigned to roles and ultimately compensated. As Social Role Theory highlights, such embedded expectations lead to systematic biases in perceived fit and performance (García-Ael et al., 2012). Even when women possess equivalent qualifications and experience, they may be viewed as less committed or capable in roles tied to authority, leadership or technical expertise (Vial & Napier, 2018). This misalignment between stereotypical expectations and actual performance contributes to hiring disparities, promotion barriers and the devaluation of female-dominated roles (Gorman, 2005). In doing so, it plays a central role in the structural reproduction of the gender pay gap, by ensuring that women remain underrepresented in higher-paying positions and undervalued in roles they are more likely to occupy.

3. Methods

This literature review seeks to explore existing academic research on how organizational culture influences the gender pay gap. The next section details the approach used to identify and select relevant studies.

3.1 Study Design and Selection Criteria

Systematic reviews are especially valuable for recognizing trends across various studies and combining evidence on a developing research topic (Petticrew & Roberts, 2008). They assist in evaluating the current state of research, pinpointing gaps, inconsistencies and conflicting results, while also uncovering relationships to create a thorough summary of the available evidence (Krupinski, 2019). Given the complex and multifaceted nature of gender pay gaps (Keller et al., 2023; Sánchez-Mira et al., 2020; Diederich et al., 2023), this method enables an in-depth analysis of the role of organizational culture in influencing pay inequalities.

The inclusion criteria for this review involved selecting peer-reviewed academic papers (criterion 1), as these are subject to rigorous quality control and ensure a baseline of methodological reliability. Studies that employed either quantitative, qualitative or mixed-methods approaches to analyse gender pay differences in various organizational settings were included (criterion 2) to allow for a comprehensive understanding of the issue from both statistical and contextual perspectives. Both cross-sectional (Shin, 2022; Topić, 2020) and longitudinal studies (Cha & Weeden, 2014; Smith-Doerr et al., 2019) were included to capture both the current state and temporal evolution of the gender pay gap. To ensure relevance, only studies published from 2010 onward were considered (criterion 3), as this time frame reflects the most recent academic and policy focus on workplace equity. The exclusion criteria involved excluding books, theses, non-peer-reviewed reports and articles unrelated to the workplace gender pay differences or studies unrelated to organizational culture as defined in this paper (criterion 4), in order to maintain a targeted and conceptually coherent scope. Lastly, non-English papers were excluded (criterion 5) to ensure consistent interpretation of findings and maintain clarity in comparative analysis. Table 1 summarizes the inclusion and exclusion criteria of this review.

Table 1

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Peer-reviewed journal articles	Books, theses, and grey literature
Empirical studies (quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods)	Studies unrelated to workplace gender pay differences or studies unrelated to organizational culture as defined in this paper.
Publications from 2010-2025	Duplicate articles
Studies examining organizational culture and the gender pay gap	Opinion pieces without empirical backing.
	Non-English articles

3.2 Search Strategy

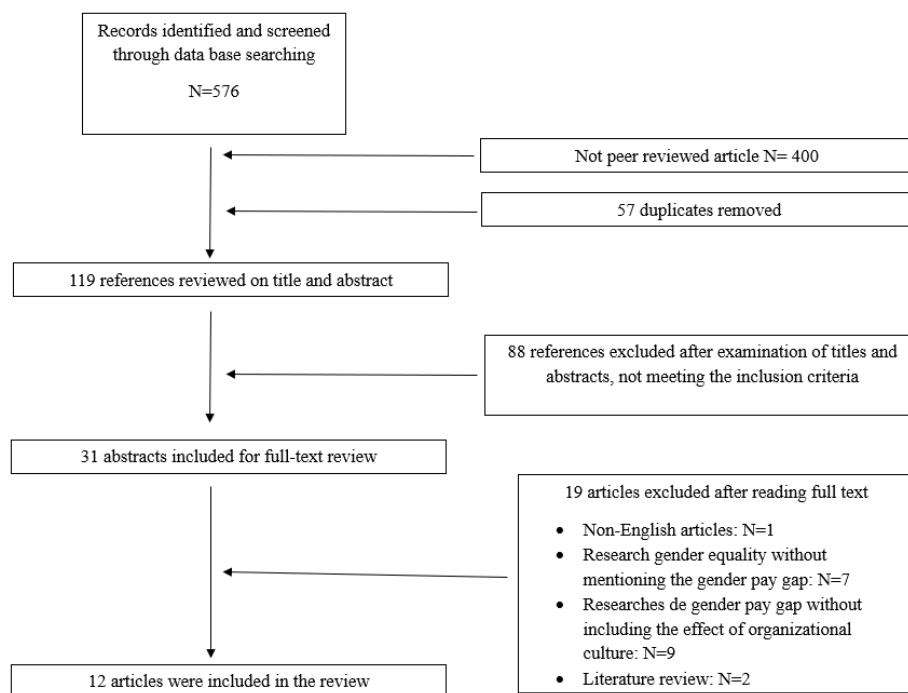
The literature search was conducted using two academic databases, namely “Web of Science” and “WorldCat” local. To identify relevant studies, key terms were derived from the research question. The search was carried out in two phases.

A broad search was performed using key terms such as "gender pay gap", "organizational culture", "corporate culture and gender wage gap" and "gender pay discrimination ". Boolean operators were applied to refine results, using "AND" to combine key concepts (e.g., "gender pay gap" AND "organizational culture") and "OR" to include synonymous terms (e.g., "corporate culture" OR "workplace norms") (see appendix B). This initial search yielded a large number of articles (576 articles).

3.3 Procedure

To ensure the selection of high-quality literature, a multi-step screening process was followed. The initial search yielded a total of 576 articles. Of these 576 articles, 400 were excluded for not meeting the peer-reviewed criteria, leaving 176 articles. A duplicate check was then conducted, resulting in the removal of 57 articles, which brought the total down to 119. The titles and abstracts of these 119 articles were subsequently screened, and 88 were excluded for being unrelated to workplace gender pay differences or organizational culture. This narrowed the selection to 31 articles. Finally, a full-text review was conducted using predefined exclusion criteria, leading to the removal of 19 additional articles (see Table 1). A final set of 12 studies were selected, covering diverse sectors, including finance (Sánchez-Mira et al., 2020), STEM (Sterling et al., 2020), advertising (Topić, 2020), medicine (Lindsay, 2020) and public administration (Smith-Doerr et al., 2019). These studies provide a broad perspective on how organizational culture influences gender pay differences. Figure 1 presents the step-by-step process of article selection.

Figure 1

Flowchart of Literature Selection**3.5 Analysis of the Selected Literature**

Appendix A provides an overview of the studies included in this review, summarizing their sample sizes, industries and key findings. The selected studies span various geographical regions, including the United States (e.g., studies by Keller et al., 2023; Cha & Weeden, 2014; Shin, 2022) and various countries in Europe (e.g., studies by Van Der Lippe et al., 2018; Diederich et al., 2023; De Coninck & Verhulst, 2024).

Regarding research methodologies, 58% of the studies used quantitative approaches (e.g., Shin, 2022; Keller et al., 2023; Smith-Doerr et al., 2019), 25% employed qualitative methods (e.g., Topić, 2020; De Coninck & Verhulst, 2024) and 17% adopted mixed-methods designs (e.g., Sánchez-Mira et al., 2020). A thematic analysis was conducted to identify key trends and patterns across the literature. These findings will be further explored in the results and discussion sections.

4. Results

This section presents the key findings of the reviewed literature, structured in alignment with the research objectives. It begins with an overview of how the selected literature defines and conceptualizes the key constructs namely, organizational culture and the gender pay gap, as shown in Table 2 (Appendix A). This is followed by an analysis of the relationships between these constructs, grouped according to shared conceptual frameworks.

4.1 Definitions and Conceptualisations

4.1.1 Definition/Conceptualisation of Organizational Culture

The reviewed literature presented a diverse range of definitions and operationalizations of organizational culture. Some studies adopted classic sociological or theoretical definitions, while others defined culture through specific traits, sector-based norms or measurable indicators. For example, De Coninck and Verhulst (2024) defined organizational culture as deeply rooted patterns of norms, values and beliefs, reflecting traditional theoretical frameworks. Similarly, Lindsay (2020) emphasized shared assumptions developed through group problem-solving and internal socialization. Van Der Lippe et al. (2018) narrowed the scope to work-life balance support as a specific cultural value domain.

Beyond definitional variation, the literature also conceptualized organizational culture across two main analytical dimensions, namely the meso-level and the micro-level. Meso-level conceptualizations understood culture as institutional and structural embedded in policies, formal governance, accountability systems and leadership representation. These were often studied through indicators such as diversity hiring practices, gender-inclusive leadership and enforceable equity policies. Micro-level conceptualizations, by contrast, focused on informal norms, everyday interactions and interpersonal dynamics such as visibility expectations, informal networks, long-hours cultures and gendered leadership norms. These dimensions were not always mutually exclusive and often intersected in practice, but they provided a useful framework for understanding how culture operated within organizations. Studies like Keller et

al. (2023) and Tate & Yang (2014) used meso-level indicators such as female leadership and diversity policies to measure cultural inclusivity. Others, such as Cha & Weeden (2014), Sánchez-Mira et al. (2020) and Topić (2020) explored how informal practices, including overwork, social exclusion and male bonding rituals functioned as gatekeepers to advancement and contributed to gender disparities in pay.

In sum, organizational culture was conceptualised across the literature as both a set of shared, deeply held beliefs and an observable system of practices and norms. These ranged from macro policy frameworks to micro-interactional dynamics, reflecting the multidimensional and context-specific nature of culture.

4.1.2 Definition/Conceptualisation of the Gender Pay Gap

In the broader literature on the gender pay gap, an important distinction is often made between average and median earnings, as the choice of metric can influence how pay disparities are interpreted (Coron, 2021). Average earnings can be skewed by a small number of very high or low earners, particularly in sectors with significant income inequality (Blau & Kahn, 2016), potentially distorting the perceived size of the gap. In contrast, median earnings are typically regarded as a more robust and representative measure, as they identify the midpoint in the earnings distribution and reduce the influence of outliers (OECD, 2023). This allows analysts to more accurately assess gender disparities experienced by the majority of the workforce, rather than a few exceptionally high earners. As such, the choice between these metrics reflects underlying methodological assumptions and can significantly affect conclusions about the scale and causes of pay inequality. Reflecting this diversity in methodological approaches, some studies, such as Sánchez-Mira et al. (2020), used national datasets and international benchmarks like those from the OECD to track aggregate disparities, while others, including Tate & Yang (2014), focused on organizational-level pay gaps to reveal firm-specific inequalities. Despite these differences, the gender pay gap is predominantly understood as a systemic outcome

shaped by structural and organizational factors, rather than a result of individual choices or performance.

Across the literature reviewed for this study, the gender pay gap was conceptualized with notable consistency. Most studies defined it as the measurable difference in average earnings between men and women (De Coninck & Verhulst, 2024; Van Der Lippe et al., 2018; Sterling et al., 2020). Several authors refined this definition by adjusting for variables such as occupation, education, working hours and experience to highlight the unexplained portion of the pay gap (Keller et al., 2023; Lindsay, 2020).

In sum, while operational differences exist, particularly regarding the choice of metric and level of analysis, the gender pay gap is consistently measured as a quantifiable disparity in earnings between men and women, either across or within organizations. The relative conceptual clarity of this construct stands in contrast to the more diffuse and contested treatment of organizational culture within the same body of literature.

4.2 Relationships Between Organizational Culture and the Gender Pay Gap

4.2.1 Structural and Policy-Oriented Cultures (Meso-Level)

Several studies have conceptualized organizational culture at the meso-level, emphasizing the role of formal structures, diversity policies and institutional governance in shaping workplace equity. Keller et al. (2023) conducted a quantitative study of 3,500 U.S. firms and 45,000 executives over 25 years, finding that inclusive corporate cultures, measured through the presence of female CEOs and diversity hiring practices, were associated with narrower gender pay gaps. Echoing this, Tate and Yang (2014) demonstrated through U.S. labor datasets covering over 800,000 individuals that organizations with a critical mass of female leaders cultivated more equitable cultures, contributing to reduced pay disparities. The importance of formal organizational structures was further highlighted by Smith-Doerr et al. (2019), whose study of seven U.S. federal science agencies, encompassing 2.8 million

employees, revealed that gender-neutral agencies with standardized pay structures exhibited smaller pay gaps compared to those with masculine-coded cultures. In academic medicine, Lindsay (2020) identified that despite the presence of policies aimed at promoting gender equality persistent pay disparities remained. This issue was largely due to a lack of transparency and weak accountability mechanisms within formal compensation systems. Meanwhile, in a European context, Van Der Lippe et al. (2018) found that although family-supportive organizational cultures were prevalent across nine countries and 259 organizations, such initiatives did not meaningfully reduce the gender pay gap unless paired with enforceable work-life policies.

Collectively, these meso-level investigations align with the middle tier of Schein's (2010) model of organizational culture, which emphasizes espoused values and norms expressed through mission statements, HR practices and diversity initiatives. However, the recurring disconnect between articulated values and enacted practices weakens the effectiveness of these interventions. This tension is further explained through Acker's (1990) Gendered Organization Theory, which suggests that while meso-level policies may attempt to reform job structures and organizational logic, they frequently fail to disrupt the underlying inequality regimes that govern power, opportunity and compensation. Lindsay's (2020) findings for instance, directly reflect Acker's notion of organizational logic by illustrating how assumed norms of value and neutrality perpetuate inequality when accountability is absent. Likewise, Keller et al.'s (2023) insights into the symbolic role of female CEOs demonstrate how organizational symbols can reshape cultural expectations around leadership legitimacy, aligning with Acker's focus on the symbolic dimension of inequality within organizational life.

In sum, meso-level studies framed organizational culture as a set of institutional structures and policies. When genuinely implemented and backed by enforcement mechanisms, these frameworks could promote equity. However, without meaningful cultural integration or

a shift in underlying assumptions, their impact on gender pay disparities was limited. These findings show that meso-level culture, while necessary, must be reinforced by change at the deeper and interactional levels.

4.2.2 Informal Cultures and Masculine Norms (Micro-Level)

A second group of studies examined organizational culture at the micro-level, focusing on how informal norms and everyday practices shape gender pay disparities within workplaces. Cha and Weeden (2014) for instance, analysed U.S. data from approximately 4.9 million individuals, finding that overwork cultures in professional sectors disproportionately disadvantaged women with caregiving responsibilities by rewarding constant availability. Expanding on how informal practices intersect with pay outcomes, Sánchez-Mira et al. (2020) demonstrated through a mixed-methods study in Spain's chemical and financial sectors that discretionary bonuses and long-hours expectations further exacerbated gender disparities, reinforcing informal workplace hierarchies. Qualitative research by Topić (2020) illuminated how subtle everyday interactions sustain inequality. Through interviews with 41 women in England's advertising sector, she showed how informal male bonding rituals and casual banter contributed to role segregation and restricted advancement opportunities for women. This pattern of informal exclusion was mirrored in Diederich et al.'s (2023) quantitative study of 353 employees within 84 European companies, which found that masculine leadership norms at the executive level penalized women who did not conform to traditional gender expectations, thereby reinforcing existing pay gaps. Other studies reinforced the idea that informal structures are often more powerful than formal policies in shaping workplace outcomes. Shin (2022), using U.S. census data on 3,567 urban planners, uncovered persistent gendered promotion patterns and structural biases favouring male candidates, especially within the private sector. Similarly, De Coninck and Verhulst (2024) documented in a qualitative case study of a Belgian professional services firm how informal power structures, such as visibility requirements and

male-dominated networks, acted as hidden cultural barriers to gender pay equity. Sterling et al. (2020) offered a nuanced counterpoint, showing in their analysis of 559 individuals across 27 U.S. engineering schools that women who valued inclusive workplace cultures reported higher salaries, suggesting that when positive informal norms take hold, they can mitigate the effects of broader gendered biases.

Collectively, these micro-level studies resonate with the deeper layers of Schein's (2010) organizational culture model, particularly the level of basic underlying assumptions. These assumptions manifest as persistent (taken-for-granted) beliefs about leadership, availability and competence, often privileging traits aligned with masculine-coded norms. From the perspective of Acker's (1990) Gendered Organization Theory, the processes of daily interaction, internalized expectations and symbolic practices are clearly evident. Women are frequently evaluated against standards of assertiveness, visibility and constant availability, which informally become prerequisites for career advancement. Topić's (2020) findings exemplify Acker's concepts of interactional and symbolic processes, where legitimacy and recognition are conferred within male-dominated informal networks. Likewise, Cha and Weeden's (2014) study highlights how internalized expectations about work commitment structure reward systems in ways that marginalize those unable, or unwilling to conform to the idealized image of the unencumbered worker.

In sum, micro-level studies conceptualized organizational culture as shaped by informal norms, interpersonal behaviours and day-to-day practices. These often reinforced masculine-coded ideals and subtly disadvantaged women, contributing to persistent gender pay gaps, even in contexts with formal equality policies. Addressing the pay gap, therefore, requires not only surface-level reforms but also a transformation of the informal deeply held assumptions and interactional norms that underpin workplace culture.

4.3 Mechanisms Linking Culture to the Gender Pay Gap

Several studies identified concrete mechanisms that explain how organizational culture contributes to the persistence of the gender pay gap. These mechanisms operate at both the structural and interactional levels and can function either as moderators, altering the strength or direction of the relationship between culture and pay, or as mediators explaining the pathway through which culture affects outcomes.

At the structural level, mechanisms such as policy enforcement, transparency and accountability structures were found to moderate the effect of culture on gender pay disparities. For instance, Lindsay (2020) and Van Der Lippe et al. (2018) emphasized that formal equality policies had limited impact when not supported by enforcement or organizational commitment. In these contexts, structural mechanisms like transparent pay frameworks, active policy monitoring and institutional accountability served as moderators that could either reinforce or reduce inequality, depending on their presence or absence. Similarly, Keller et al. (2023) demonstrated that gender-inclusive firms, with female leadership and diversity policies, mitigated the negative impact of male-dominated organizational norms, acting as a moderating buffer.

In contrast, mechanisms at the interactional level reflected informal workplace dynamics and psychological responses. These included conformity pressure, visibility expectations and perceptions of legitimacy shaped by cultural norms. For example, De Coninck and Verhulst (2024) described how informal power structures, such as the need for constant physical presence or access to male-dominated networks, disproportionately disadvantaged women with caregiving responsibilities. These mechanisms operated through daily interactions and expectations, enforcing masculine-coded ideals that shaped who was seen as promotable or committed. In addition, psychological mediators emerged. Sterling et al. (2020) for instance, found that self-efficacy (a person's belief in their own competence) mediated the relationship between workplace culture and salary. In inclusive cultures that emphasized support and

collaboration, women reported higher confidence levels, which positively influenced salary outcomes. This suggests that internalized beliefs, shaped by the surrounding culture, can influence the extent to which individuals pursue advancement or negotiate compensation.

Some studies also indicated that interventions themselves could act as moderating mechanisms. For example, De Coninck and Verhulst (2024) noted that flexible work policies may reduce the penalizing effects of “up or out” cultures. Sánchez-Mira et al. (2020) similarly argued that limiting rewards for overwork could moderate the effect of long-hours norms on gendered outcomes.

In sum, the findings indicate that organizational culture influences the gender pay gap through a combination of structural moderators (e.g., transparency, enforcement mechanisms, diversity policies) and interactional or psychological mediators (e.g., self-efficacy, conformity pressure, informal visibility norms). Structural moderators define the policy environment and determine whether equity measures are upheld, while interactional mediators shape how individuals experience and respond to organizational culture on a day-to-day basis. These mechanisms reveal that culture operates both systemically and subjectively, reinforcing the need to align formal structures with inclusive interpersonal norms to effectively address pay inequality.

5. Discussion

5.1 Interpretation of Findings

This study began with the research question: “What is the role of organizational culture in shaping the gender pay gap in the workplace?” The aim was to explore how organizational culture influences the gender pay gap through a structured review of recent literature. The findings demonstrate that this relationship is highly contingent on how both constructs (organizational culture and the gender pay gap) are conceptualized and operationalized across the literature. Organizational culture emerges from the literature as a multi-dimensional

construct. Some studies emphasize meso-level elements, including formal governance structures, diversity policies and leadership representation. Others focus on micro-level cultural norms, such as visibility requirements, informal networking and gendered behavioural expectations. Research that adopts a meso-level conceptualization tends to demonstrate that inclusive and policy-driven cultures are associated with narrower gender pay gaps, particularly when policies are implemented meaningfully and backed by accountability structures (Keller et al., 2023; Tate & Yang, 2014). However, studies also show that when such measures are merely symbolic or lack enforcement mechanisms, their impact on gender equity is limited (Van Der Lippe et al., 2018; Lindsay, 2020). In contrast, micro-level studies emphasize how gendered expectations and informal norms can override formal policies. These norms include masculine-coded ideals such as constant availability, assertiveness and informal bonding practices (Cha and Weeden, 2014; Sánchez-Mira et al., 2020; Topić, 2020). Furthermore, the interplay between formal structures and informal norms is especially visible in sectors characterized by long-hours cultures and visibility-based advancement. In these contexts, as described by Sánchez-Mira et al. (2020), ideal worker norms such as constant availability and prioritization of work above all else disproportionately disadvantage women, particularly mothers. These norms are both culturally reinforced and structurally embedded, reflecting the dual lens provided by both theoretical frameworks.

While the results section distinguishes between meso-level (structural) and micro-level (informal) conceptualisations of organizational culture, several studies reveal that these levels sometimes could intersect in practice. For instance, Smith-Doerr et al. (2019) highlight how disciplinary norms that are cultural in nature, shape the design and outcomes of structural pay systems. Similarly, Tate and Yang (2014) show that while female leadership is a structural feature, its effectiveness in reducing the gender pay gap depends on informal cultural support, such as inclusive norms and collective acceptance. These examples demonstrate that

organizational culture does not function solely at one level, rather it is the interaction between formal policies and informal expectations that sustains or challenges gender pay disparities. This observation underscores the importance of an integrated approach to cultural change, one that aligns leadership structures, accountability systems and everyday norms.

To conclude, while some studies present more complex or context-dependent outcomes (Smith-Doerr et al., 2019; Tate & Yang, 2014), these findings do not contradict the theoretical claims but rather highlight that the effect of culture is not linear. Instead, it is shaped by how formal systems interact with embedded assumptions and everyday practices. For example, having a female CEO does not automatically transform culture unless accompanied by broader cultural shifts that challenge underlying norms.

5.2 Interpretation through the lens of gendered organization theory & social role theory

Studies by Cha and Weeden (2014), Topić (2020) and De Coninck and Verhulst (2024) illustrate how informal dynamics reproduce inequality, by privileging behaviours more commonly associated with men and penalizing those who do not or cannot conform, particularly caregivers. This dynamic underscores the relevance of Acker's Gendered Organization Theory (1990), which posits that organizations are fundamentally structured around male norms that are embedded in job design, evaluation processes and workplace logic. The findings from this review strongly support this view, showing that even when organizations promote formal equality, gendered assumptions remain established in daily practices. Specifically, the processes Acker identifies, such as the construction of job roles (e.g., visibility and availability as criteria for advancement), interactions (e.g., informal bonding or banter) and internal mental work (e.g., perceptions of who is "leadership material"), can be clearly observed in the reviewed literature. These cultural elements function not only as informal barriers but as structural filters that shape who advances and who remains stuck, thus perpetuating pay disparities.

Social Role Theory further deepens the analysis by explaining how culturally constructed gender norms shape evaluations and decisions related to hiring, promotion and compensation. According to Eagly and Wood (1991), expectations that women should exhibit communal traits clash with the agentic qualities typically rewarded in high-status roles. This theoretical framework helps unpack why women are often penalized for either failing to display agentic traits or for violating gender expectations when they do. Multiple studies in the review reveal that women are either penalized for not fitting the expected mold of leadership or for violating gender norms when they do. This is evident in the findings from Diederich et al. (2023) and Shin (2022), where women in leadership are evaluated less favourably, not due to performance, but due to a misalignment between gender stereotypes and role expectations. These outcomes illustrate how perceived lack of fit, as predicted by Social Role Theory, contributes to occupational segregation and pay inequality. Furthermore, the interplay between Acker's symbolic and interactional processes and Social Role Theory's communal-agentic dichotomy helps explain how even informal cultural practices, like rewarding assertiveness or penalizing caregiving-related flexibility, reinforce institutional gender bias in both subtle and apparent ways.

5.3 Limitations

This study is subject to several limitations. First, the literature selection was limited to studies published in the past decade. This limitation may reduce the theoretical depth of the study by excluding foundational work that continues to inform current understandings of organizational culture and gender inequality. As a result, the findings may reflect recent trends while overlooking long-standing structural mechanisms or conceptual frameworks that remain relevant to the gender pay gap (Webster & Watson, 2002). Second, the reviewed studies vary in methodological quality and approach, ranging from large-scale quantitative surveys to smaller qualitative case studies, which may limit comparability and robustness across findings

(Booth et al., 2022). Third, most studies are grounded in Western, high-income contexts such as the United States and Europe, which raises concerns about the generalizability of findings to non-Western cultural or institutional settings (Hofstede, 2001). These limitations should be considered when interpreting the overall conclusions of the review.

5.4 Future Research Directions

Future research should address these limitations by incorporating seminal studies and earlier publications, yet still relevant theoretical frameworks to provide historical depth and continuity to contemporary debates. Moreover, cross-cultural and longitudinal studies are needed to investigate how organizational culture and gender pay disparities evolve over time and across different institutional settings. Researchers should also prioritize developing more unified conceptual tools to capture the informal, symbolic and normative elements of culture alongside formal policies. Additionally, future studies should explore intersectional dimensions of inequality, such as how race and age intersect with gender in shaping pay outcomes, to offer a more comprehensive understanding of systematic disparities. Investigating mechanisms of cultural change within organizations, including resistance to equity reforms and the role of leadership in fostering inclusive practices, could provide actionable insights for both scholars and practitioners.

5.5 Practical Contributions

The practical implications of this review are relevant for policymakers, HR professionals and organizational leaders. One major insight is that formal diversity or inclusion policies alone are insufficient to eliminate gender pay disparities. Instead, meaningful change requires that such policies be deeply embedded within the organization's culture and supported by accountability mechanisms. Informal practices, leadership role models and internal expectations must also align with the values of equity and transparency. To that end, responsibility for action should fall at multiple organizational levels. HR departments should

be tasked with introducing regular gender pay audits, clearly communicating compensation criteria and establishing transparent promotion pathways. Management must be equipped through bias-awareness training to identify how informal norms, like constant availability or self-promotion, can influence decision-making and must take ownership of equity outcomes by embedding them into strategic goals and performance indicators (Geradine & McWha-Hermann, 2024).

Interviews conducted with two practitioners (See Appendix C) working at a hotel and a municipal organization deepened the findings on the topics of organizational culture and gender pay gap. Both respondents emphasized that organizational culture is primarily experienced through daily behaviours, informal interactions and managerial attitudes rather than through formal definitions. Although both organizations had diversity and inclusion policies in place, they lacked localized initiatives or data to assess gender pay disparities. This reflects the broader literature finding that symbolic compliance without enforcement or transparency often has limited impact.

Additionally, both interviewees identified informal cultural dynamics such as visibility, overwork and assertiveness as key factors influencing who gets noticed and promoted. These expectations, while not explicitly stated, tend to reward masculine-coded behaviours and can disadvantage individuals, particularly women who are less able or willing to conform. The presence of female leadership in both organizations was viewed positively and seen as encouraging greater inclusivity, but respondents also noted that without structural pay audits or open dialogue about inequality, deeper change is unlikely. These interviews echo the reviewed literature's emphasis on accountability and cultural alignment. Well-meaning policies cannot succeed if informal norms continue to reinforce unequal expectations. Embedding cultural change therefore requires both structural adjustments and consistent attention to everyday interactions that signal who belongs and who is valued.

6. Conclusion

This research has examined how organizational culture influences the gender pay gap by synthesizing insights from recent academic literature. The review reveals that while inclusive policy structures can support gender pay equity, they remain only effective when coupled with deeper cultural transformation that challenges masculine norms and informal exclusionary mechanisms. The way organizational culture is defined, whether through formal structures or informal practices, significantly shapes how its relationship to pay disparities is understood. Informal norms, leadership expectations and behavioural patterns are often more powerful than formal equality frameworks in determining real-world outcomes. As such, organizations that aim to address gender pay inequities must go beyond surface-level interventions and actively reshape their cultural foundations. Theoretically, this study contributes to the understanding of organizational culture as a layered and dynamic system that not only reflects but also sustains structural inequality. Practically, it highlights the necessity of integrated strategies that combine policy reform with cultural accountability, ensuring that organizational change is both authentic and effective in promoting workplace equity.

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Appendix A*Review articles*

Author(s) & years	Title	Sector / population	Design + sample size	Main findings
Cha, & Weeden, (2014)	<i>“Overwork and the Slow Convergence in the Gender Gap in Wages”</i>	Non-institutionalized civilian workers aged 18-64. Data Sources: MORG (CPS) for 1979-2009; SIPP for 1996 and 2004	N= 4,983,875 (trend analysis), N= 627,763 (JMP decomposition) (quantitative method)	Overwork started to yield a wage premium rather than a penalty, particularly in managerial and professional occupations, where overwork was prevalent. Occupational culture: In professions and management, organizational norms around overwork led to higher compensation for long hours, but women were less likely to benefit from this due to gendered caregiving expectations. Impact on women: Despite equal educational and labor market progress, women were still hindered by these organizational expectations, leading to stagnation in wage equality, especially for mothers who couldn't fully benefit from rising wages tied to overwork.

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De Coninck, & Verhulst, (2024)	<i>“Inequality beneath the surface: a Belgian case study on structural discrimination in the workplace and the role of organizational structure, culture and policies”</i>	multinational professional service agency in Belgium	Qualitative case study approach. 10 semi-structured in-depth interviews with employees at various organizational levels N=10	<p>the organization exhibits unexplained wage disparities between men and women, even when controlling for education and experience. A glass ceiling effect was identified, where women are underrepresented in senior positions. The "up or out" culture (forcing employees to either advance or leave) disproportionately affects women, especially mothers, leading to higher turnover.</p> <p>Visibility and face time (being physically present in the office) impact promotion chances, disadvantaging women with caregiving responsibilities. The gender pay gap persists due to biased promotion policies, lack of transparency, and informal male-dominated networks.</p>
Diederich et al. (2023)	<i>“Role (in-)congruity and the Catch 22 for female executives: how stereotyping contributes to the gender pay gap at top executive level”</i>	Publicly listed firms in the Euro Stoxx 50 and Stoxx Europe 50 indices, covering 84 firms across 11 European countries.	quantitative study N=353	<p>masculine leadership traits, such as assertiveness and competitiveness, dominate top positions, leading to a pay gap between men and women. Women in leadership roles often face the challenge of balancing stereotypical gender expectations with masculine-coded role demands.</p> <p>Furthermore, the lack of female representation in high-paying positions</p>

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		top executives in these firms were selected for this research		perpetuates the gender pay gap, as organizational culture reinforces these disparities by prioritizing masculine characteristics for leadership and salary advancement.
Keller et al. (2023)	<i>"The gender gap among top business executives"</i>	Top executives of S&P firms (USA)	N= 45000 3,500 firms, 45,000 executives (1992–2017) Quantitative observational study	Corporate culture influences the gender pay gap: female-friendly firms have smaller gaps, while male-dominated cultures show larger disparities, especially in bonuses. Temporal flexibility has little effect. About 18% of the gap's decline is linked to improved corporate culture
Lindsay, (2020)	<i>"Gender-Based Pay Discrimination in Otolaryngology"</i>	Medical sector, specifically otolaryngology (ear, nose, and throat surgery). Focuses on academic institutions in the United States	Quantitative study analysing salary data from the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC). Uses voluntary self-reported compensation data from academic institutions. N = not specified	Systemic workplace culture issues contribute to the gender pay gap by: Unequal access to resources which directly impact earning potential. Lack of transparency in pay structures and a culture of "benign neglect" in addressing gender pay disparities. Broader economic impact: The gender pay gap reduces women's lifetime earnings and wealth accumulation, with women only having 32% of the wealth of men over time. It also impacts recruitment and retention of female medical

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				<p>professionals, potentially deterring women from pursuing careers in high-paying surgical specialties.</p> <p>-Unequal distribution of professional opportunities and resources: reinforces salary disparities.</p> <p>-Organizational culture tolerates systemic gender biases: leading to persistent pay gaps.</p> <p>-Lack of institutional accountability and pay transparency: perpetuates wage inequality despite legal protections.</p>
Van Der Lippe et al. (2018)	<i>“Organizational Work-Life Policies and the Gender Wage Gap in European Workplaces”</i>	The study surveyed organizations across six industries. In Bulgaria, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom	Random selection of organizations based on national business lists, stratified by organization size (259 organizations selected) (quantitative method)N= 11011	Family-supportive organizational culture does not have a significant impact on reducing the gender wage gap. The interaction between family-supportive culture and gender was not statistically significant ($p = 0.888$), suggesting that this culture does not directly contribute to narrowing the wage gap between men and women. However, the analysis shows that work-life policies, even when controlling for family-supportive culture, continue to play an independent role in reducing the

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				gender wage gap. This supports the idea that the adoption of work–life policies sends a symbolic signal that helps promote gender equality in wages.
Sánchez-Mira et al. (2020)	<i>“What slips through the cracks: The distance between regulations and practices shaping the gender pay gap”</i>	Chemical industry and core financial services (banking) in Spain	N=42 19 expert interviews (28 informants), 2 focus groups (14 participants), analysis of collective agreements (CAs) Mixed-methods study (quantitative and qualitative)	Organizational culture and managerial discretion shape the gender pay gap (GPG) in both sectors. In the chemical industry, despite strong regulations, gender biases persist due to weak enforcement, undervaluation of women’s work, and discretionary pay supplements favoring men. In financial services, the GPG is driven by a lack of transparency in promotions and bonuses, with managerial discretion and a long-hours culture disproportionately disadvantaging women. While the chemical industry struggles with circumvented regulations, financial services face unchecked managerial power, both reinforcing gender inequalities
Shin, (2022)	<i>“Representation and Wage Gaps in the Planning Profession A Focus on Gender and Race/Ethnicity”</i>	urban and regional planners in the United States. Uses PUMS data (Public Use Microdata	Quantitative study analyzing data from 2000, 2008, and 2016. N= 3,567	Gender pay gap persists: Women earned 81% of men’s wages in 2000, improving to 89% in 2016, but the gap remains statistically significant even after

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		Sample) from the U.S. Census, covering 5% of the U.S. population.		<p>controlling for education, experience, and work hours.</p> <p>Fathers earned more than child-free men, while mothers did not see a wage benefit, indicating employer bias favoring men with families.</p> <p>Work hours & experience gaps explain part of the pay gap, as male planners generally had more years of experience and worked longer hours, but these factors do not fully account for the wage disparity.</p> <p>Private sector planning organizations reinforce wage inequality more than the public sector. Structural biases (e.g., work-hour expectations, promotion policies, and gendered leadership norms) drive pay disparities. Cultural expectations around family roles disadvantage women's wages, even when accounting for productivity-related factors.</p>
Smith-Doerr et al. (2019)	<i>"Gender Pay Gaps in US Federal Science Agencies:"</i>	Focuses on seven U.S. federal science agencies, including	Quantitative study using a 15-year dataset	The overall gender pay gap decreased over time, but significant disparities remain. Women earned \$0.58 to \$0.78 per dollar

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	<i>An Organizational Approach”</i>	NOAA, NIH, USDA, NSF, CDC, EPA, and DOE, covering disciplines like physical sciences, engineering, and life sciences	N= 2.800 000	compared to men in 1994, improving to \$0.73 to \$0.89 per dollar by 2008 .Masculine-science agencies (engineering, physical sciences) showed larger pay gaps than gender-neutral agencies (life sciences, interdisciplinary fields). The biggest contributor to the gender pay gap was organizational pay structures, where men were more likely to be paid off the standard federal pay grade, leading to higher earnings. Within-job discrimination (men earning more than equally qualified women in the same role) was a bigger issue in male-dominated agencies
Sterling et al. (2020)	<i>“The confidence gap predicts the gender pay gap among STEM graduates.”</i>	350 US engineering schools The sample is drawn from 27 EMS (engineering schools).	stratified sampling scheme to select the 27 EMS institutions.(quantitative) N= 559	Workplace Culture and Pay: Workplace Culture is found to influence salary: Women value workplace culture more than men ($\beta = 0.46$, $P < 0.01$). Valuing workplace culture is associated with a higher salary ($\beta = 0.04$, $P < 0.01$).

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Tate & Yang, (2014)	<i>“Female leadership and gender equity: Evidence from plant closure”</i>	LEHD data (covers 96% of all civilian jobs in the U.S.)LBD data (all non-farm establishments with paid employees in the U.S. since 1976)	<p>Linked data of workers (LEHD) and plants (LBD) (quantitative data collection)</p> <p>-Closing plants (LBD,1993-2001): 143,370</p> <p>-Multi-unit plants (LBD-LEHD): 1,850</p> <p>-All plants (LBD, 1993-2001): 655,929</p> <p>N= 801149</p>	Companies led by female CEOs tend to foster a more inclusive and equitable organizational culture, which helps reduce the gender pay gap. But one woman in a leadership role is not enough to change the organizational culture, but a critical mass of women in leadership positions can make a significant difference. The study shows that women are 26.5% more likely to join a company led by a female CEO, as these environments promote diversity and reduce discrimination. As a result, women in these organizations experience a smaller pay gap and better career opportunities, reflecting the positive influence of organizational culture on gender equality.
Topić, (2020)	<i>“It's something that you should go to HR about' - banter, social interactions and career barriers for women in the advertising industry in England”</i>	Women working in the advertising industry, including roles in creative, account handling, marketing, media, business development, planning, design, and owner/director/partner.	<p>Qualitative study using semi-structured interviews.</p> <p>N= 41</p>	The gender pay gap in advertising is deeply tied to a masculine-dominated organizational culture. Women report feeling alienated by male-dominated social norms, such as banter and communication styles, which create an environment where they must work harder to gain recognition and advance. This masculine culture leads to gendered role segregation, with women often excluded from higher-paying creative roles. The paper emphasizes that these

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				cultural practices, embedded in the organization, contribute to the gender pay gap and maintain structural inequality, making it harder for women to succeed in male-dominated environments.
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Table 2

Summary of recorded definitions, influences of organizational culture on the gender pay gap and mechanism types

Author + year	Definition organizational culture	Dimension of organizational culture	Level of organizational culture according to Shein's model	Gendered organizational process according to Acker's theory	Definition gender pay gap	average versus median measured pay gap	Relationship OC and GPG + cause of the relationship	Mechanism type (moderator /mediator)
Cha, & Weeden, (2014)	No clear definition, but they talk about overwork that is deeply embedded in organizational practices and occupational cultures	Micro (Informal Cultures and Masculine Norms)	Basic Underlying Assumptions	Interactions , Internal Mental Work, Organizational Logic	aggregate difference in wages between men and women (Cha and Weeden, 2014)	Average	organizational culture → gender pay gap - (overwork culture)	
De Coninck, & Verhulst, (2024)	deeply rooted patterns of norms, values and beliefs. This shared culture shapes the behaviors and expectations within the	Micro (Informal Cultures and Masculine Norms)	Basic Underlying Assumptions	Interactions , Symbols	disparity in average earnings between genders (De Coninck	Average	organizational culture → gender pay gap - (biased promotion policies, lack	up or out culture can be mitigated by flexible work

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	organization. (De Coninck and Verhulst, 2024)				and Verhulst, 2024)		of transparency, and informal male-dominated networks)	policies (moderator)
Diederich et al. (2023)	No clear definition, but organizational culture is the average masculinity of the functions held by an executive.	Micro (Informal Cultures and Masculine Norms)	Basic Underlying Assumptions	Interactions , Symbols	unequal executive compensation rooted in gender stereotypes and the perceived masculinity of roles (Diederich et al., 2023)	Average	organizational culture → gender pay gap - (Masculine culture + underrepresentation)	

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Keller et al. (2023)	<p>corporate culture is defined and operationalized using two main indicators from the KLD Research and Analytics' corporate social responsibility index (Keller et al., 2023):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Firm Diversity, this refers to <i>the extent to which a firm has hired and promoted women and minorities into leadership positions</i>. It reflects whether a firm is actively inclusive and supports diversity at the executive level. 2. Female CEO Presence, this is a binary measure indicating 	Meso (Structural and Policy-Oriented Cultures)	Espoused Values	Organizational logic, symbols	female executives with similar experience and education, working at similar firms, and doing similar jobs earning less than their male colleagues (Keller et al., 2023)	Average	organizational culture → gender pay gap + (female friendly culture and improved corporate culture)	female-friendly firms mitigate the effects of corporate culture on gender employment and pay gaps (moderator)
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	whether the firm has <i>ever had a female CEO</i> . It serves as a signal of a more gender-inclusive leadership environment.							
Lindsay, (2020)	A pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems (Lindsay, 2020).	Meso (Structural and Policy-Oriented Cultures)	Espoused Values	Organizational logic	The difference between the amounts of money paid to women and men for doing the same work with similar levels of experience (Lindsay, 2020).	Average	organizational culture → gender pay gap - (Unequal access to resources + benign neglect)	

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Van Der Lippe et al. (2018)	By this we mean the shared assumptions, beliefs, and values regarding the extent to which an organization supports the integration of employees' work and family lives (Van Der Lippe et al., 2018).	Meso (Structural and Policy-Oriented Cultures)	Espoused Values	Organizational logic, job division	The measurable difference in earnings between men and women, used here as a primary indicator of gender inequality within organizations (Van Der Lippe et al., 2018).	Average	Family-supportive → organizational culture and gender pay gap /	work-life policies in organizations is associated with a smaller gender wage gap (moderator)
Sánchez-Mira et al. (2020)	No clear definition, but Gender inequalities in pay are embedded in the specific contexts of WO, regulated differently through	Micro (Informal Cultures and Masculine Norms)	Basic underlying assumptions	Interactions, Organizational Logic	Literature definition: the gender pay gap (GPG) appears as the	Median	organizational culture → gender pay gap - (long-hours culture)	Limiting rewards for long hours would contribute to mitigating

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	CB, and characterized by different managerial practices and organizational cultures. The prolongation of working time has progressively become the norm and is very much embedded in the organizational culture.				synthesis of women's situation of disadvantage in the labour market and is intimately related to key aspects of the organization of work. Analysis definition: Gender pay gap (difference male–female earnings as % of male earnings) (Sánchez-			long hours cultures, with benefits for all workers, regardless of gender (moderator)
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					Mira et al., 2020)			
Shin, (2022)	No clear definition, measured by professional cultures centered around masculine values that likely persists.	Micro (Informal Cultures and Masculine Norms)	Basic underlying assumption s	Organizatio nal logic, job division	the female- to-male earnings ratio disparities (Shin, 2022)	Average	organizational culture → gender pay gap - (Structural biases: work- hour expectations, promotion policies, and gendered leadership norms and masculine workplace culture)	
Smith- Doerr et al. (2019)	No clear definition, but measured as disciplinary differences that play a role in shaping the structure and culture of organizations	Meso (Structural and Policy- Oriented Cultures)	Espoused Values	Organizatio nal logic, symbols	men earning more than equally qualified women in the same	Average	organizational culture → the gender pay gap + and - (dependent on Masculine culture and	

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					role (Smith- Doerr et al., 2019)		gender-neutral culture)	
Sterling et al. (2020)	The values, norms, and environment of a workplace, particularly those related to inclusivity, collaboration versus competition, and overall employee experience, especially as perceived and prioritized by workers (Sterling et al., 2020)	Micro (Informal Cultures and Masculine Norms)	Basic underlying assumption s	Internal mental work, symbols	Difference in annual salary between men and women (Sterling et al., 2020)	Average	organizational culture → the gender pay gap + (Valuing workplace culture)	self- efficacy mediates the relationship between gender and salary (mediator)
Tate & Yang, (2014)	a specific policy dimension that is plausibly related to notions of organizational fairness and trust	Meso (Structural and Policy- Oriented Cultures)	Espoused Values	Organizatio nal logic, symbols	pay disparity inside the firm between men and women (controlling	Average	organizational culture → the gender pay gap + (effect of female CEO)	

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	(Tate and Yang, 2014)				for worker characteristics) (Tate and Yang, 2014)			
Topić, (2020)	Organizational culture in the advertising industry is described as being shaped by masculine norms and practices, often embedded within formal and informal communication and interactions. This includes long working hours, male-dominated networking, banter, dress codes, and informal exclusionary practices, including (homo)social bonding like, men	Micro (Informal Cultures and Masculine Norms)	Basic underlying assumptions	Interactions, symbols	persistent income inequality despite women's strong presence in the industry (Topić, 2020).	Average	organizational culture → the gender pay gap - (masculine culture leads to gendered role segregation)	

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	bonding with men in informal spaces, which reinforces male dominance (Topić, 2020)							
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OC= organizational culture

GPG= gender pay gap

+ means a positive effect

– means a negative effect

/ means no effect

Cause of relationship between OC and GPG between brackets () in colu

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Appendix B*Searched keywords*

Database	Keywords	Results
WorldCat	kw:("organizational culture") OR kw:("organisational culture") OR kw:("corporate culture") OR kw:("workplace culture") AND kw:("gender pay gap")	65
WorldCat	kw:("organizational culture") OR kw:("organisational culture") OR kw:("corporate culture") OR kw:("workplace culture") AND kw:("gender salary gap")	0
WorldCat	kw:("organizational culture") OR kw:("organisational culture") OR kw:("corporate culture") OR kw:("workplace culture") AND kw:("gender wage gap")	14
WorldCat	ti:("organizational culture") OR ti:("organisational culture") OR ti:("corporate culture") OR ti:("workplace culture") AND ti:("gender pay gap")	1
WorldCat	ti:("organizational culture") OR ti:("organisational culture") OR ti:("corporate culture") OR ti:("workplace culture") AND ti:("gender wage gap")	3
WorldCat	kw:("organizational norms") OR kw:("organizational values") AND kw:("gender pay gap")	2
WorldCat	kw:("organizational norms") OR kw:("organizational values") AND kw:("gender wage gap")	1
WorldCat	kw:(masculine culture) AND kw:("gender wage gap")	4
WorldCat	kw:(feminine culture) AND kw:("gender wage gap")	11
WorldCat	kw:(masculine culture) AND kw:("gender pay gap")	15
WorldCat	kw:(feminine culture) AND kw:("gender pay gap")	8
WorldCat	kw:(gender pay gap) AND kw:("organizational believes")	0
WorldCat	kw:("Gender inequalities in the workplace")	58
WorldCat	kw:("Gender inequality in the workplace") AND kw:("gender pay gap") OR kw:("gender wage gap") AND kw:("organizational culture")	0
WorldCat	kw:(Gender inequality in the workplace) AND kw:("organizational culture")	145
WorldCat	kw:(gender pay discrimination) AND kw:("organizational culture")	79
Web of Science	organizational culture and gender wage gap	11
Web of Science	organizational culture and gender pay gap	20
Web of Science	organisational culture and gender pay gap	19

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Database	Keywords	Results
Web of Science	organisational culture and gender wage gap	9
Web of Science	masculine culture and gender pay gap	11
Web of Science	feminine culture and gender pay gap	5
Web of Science	hierarchical culture and gender pay gap	3
Web of Science	organizational believes and gender pay gap	16
Web of Science	organizational believes and gender wage gap	10

Appendix C

Summarised transcripts of conducted interviews

Interview Summary: Amal - Front Office Manager, Holiday Inn Express Amsterdam-North Riverside

Amal, the Front Office Manager at Holiday Inn Express Amsterdam-North Riverside, described her organization's culture as fast-paced, yet highly collaborative and supportive. While the culture is informed by the broader IHG corporate values, Amal emphasized that the culture is primarily experienced through daily behaviours and interpersonal interactions. Formal mechanisms such as brand standards, training and performance reviews exist, but the informal day-to-day teamwork and mutual respect between colleagues play a significant role in shaping the working environment. Although IHG promotes equality at the group level, Amal noted that the gender pay gap is not an active topic of discussion at the hotel itself. Pay scales are structured by HR and tied to job roles, with limited transparency and little local insight into potential disparities between male and female employees. Amal has not observed formal structural analyses at the hotel level to investigate such discrepancies, suggesting that monitoring and enforcement are primarily handled at the corporate level. Diversity and inclusion are reflected in IHG's official training and onboarding, and Amal believes these efforts foster a more inclusive environment. However, without access to specific local pay data, it remains difficult to assess their effectiveness in reducing gendered pay inequalities. Systems are in place to report concerns, and HR is responsive, but structural change seems limited by the lack of open discussion about pay fairness.

In terms of informal cultural dynamics, Amal acknowledged that assertiveness, visibility and constant availability often lead to greater recognition and advancement opportunities. These traits, traditionally associated with male leadership norms, can unintentionally shape who is seen as promotable, despite efforts by management to evaluate

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performance more equitably. The existence of unspoken expectations to go “above and beyond,” particularly during busy periods, illustrates how informal norms around flexibility and overwork can disadvantage employees with caregiving responsibilities, many of whom are women. Leadership plays a central role in setting the tone for inclusivity. Amal highlighted the presence of women in senior leadership, such as the hotel’s female general manager, as having a positive impact on normalizing diversity. Nonetheless, she pointed out that resistance to change often stems from unconscious biases and a lack of open dialogue. Decisions based on perceived “readiness” rather than objective performance can reinforce inequality.

Looking ahead, Amal believes that greater pay transparency, clearer criteria for promotions, raises and targeted bias training are necessary steps to build a fairer compensation system. While the hotel environment is perceived as supportive, the interview underscores how gender pay inequality can persist subtly through informal norms and implicit expectations, an issue that is difficult to address without deliberate local-level data analysis and cultural introspection.

Interview Summary: Bouchra – Client Manager, Municipality of Breda

Bouchra, a client manager working within the social domain of the Municipality of Breda, offered valuable insights into the role of organizational culture in shaping workplace dynamics and potential gender-based disparities. She described the organizational culture as evolving, particularly since 2021, when an internal dialogue survey revealed dissatisfaction among employees. In response, the municipality launched the program “Samen ergens van zijn” (Being Part of Something Together), focusing on shared goals such as team development and creating space for growth. This initiative helped cultivate a more inclusive and transparent culture, though Bouchra noted that it remains primarily experienced through behaviours rather than formal definitions. The culture is shaped by both formal and informal mechanisms. While policy is influenced by municipal and national regulations, much of the day-to-day environment

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is guided by interpersonal conduct and leadership tone. One key shift has been increased communication and inclusiveness, especially under the current (female) department head, whom Bouchra described as more approachable and engaged than her predecessor. This change in leadership style has contributed to a more open and supportive working environment.

When asked about the gender pay gap, Bouchra noted that it has not been a subject of explicit discussion or local investigation. However, she believes the municipality likely performs structural pay analyses at higher levels, in accordance with national CAO agreements. Pay and working conditions are determined by a combination of national legislation and internal policy, documented in a comprehensive employee handbook. While these systems aim to ensure equity, the lack of open access to local pay data makes it difficult to assess whether gender disparities exist at the departmental level. In terms of diversity and inclusion, the municipality has implemented policies such as the Inzetbaarheidsbeleid (Employability Policy), which responds to broader societal challenges like labor shortages and aging populations. These policies aim to increase accessibility and adaptability for all employees. Mechanisms exist to monitor and adjust them, but their effect on closing the gender pay gap is less clear, especially in the absence of consistent data evaluation. Regarding informal cultural practices, Bouchra mentioned that unpaid overtime and the assumption of additional tasks are common but not formally rewarded. While she has not personally witnessed male-dominated norms influencing promotions, she acknowledged that work pressure and stress are frequent, and recognition for extra effort remains informal and inconsistently applied. These practices, although not overtly gendered, may still contribute to hidden inequalities, particularly for those less able to take on unpaid work such as caregivers (often women). Leadership was identified as a key driver of cultural change. Bouchra emphasized the importance of visibility, communication and inclusion in building a fair workplace. Previous efforts to increase pay equity were initiated in response to internal complaints, leading to performance-based evaluation systems. However,

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resistance to structural and cultural change persists, especially when gender inequality is viewed as a secondary concern.

In closing, Bouchra stressed the importance of honesty, openness and valuing diversity as a strength. Her interview highlights how public sector organizations may have the formal tools to promote equality, but informal expectations and limited transparency can still hinder genuine pay equity, underscoring the complexity of aligning organizational culture with fair compensation practices.