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MASTER'S THESIS

UNDERSTANDING PERSPECTIVES ON THE GENDER PAY GAP IN THE TECH INDUSTRY

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

EU – European Union

ICT – Information and Communication Technology

ISEF – Intel Science and Engineering Fair

IT – Information Technology

UK – United Kingdom

SAT – Scholastic Assessment Test

SSH – Social Sciences and Humanities

STEM – Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics

SWIFT – Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunications

VBA – Visual Basic for Applications

1   INTRODUCTION

Gender pay gap remains a persistent issue across various industries, including the tech industry. Despite advancements in gender equality in the workplace, women in the tech industry continue to earn less than men in equivalent positions, with women earning an average of 16 percent less than men in similar roles (National Partnership for Women and Families, 2021). Factors contributing to the gender pay gap include unconscious bias in hiring and promotion, lack of diversity in upper management, gender stereotypes, and negotiation gaps. Preconceived notions about gender roles may also influence women to avoid pursuing technology-related careers, which can begin in high school (PwC UK, 2017).

The standardization of technological products and processes has also contributed to the separation of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) professions into technical and non-technical profiles, making it difficult for women to progress in the tech industry (Arroyo & Valenduc, 2016; Glover & Guerrier, 2010; Valenduc, 2011). Furthermore, women's family responsibilities, such as caregiving and childcare, can limit career progression opportunities and result in reduced work hours (Hegewisch & Gornick, 2011). Finally, the lack of transparency in pay practices and women's reluctance to negotiate their salaries or ask for raises are also significant barriers to achieving pay equality (O'Neill & Pollock, 2017; Farrow, 2021).

The primary objective of this master's thesis is to thoroughly investigate the factors that influence the gender pay gap within the tech industry. The intention is to identify practical and actionable strategies for utilizing existing tools, such as equal pay policies, diversity and inclusion programs, mentorship, and leadership development initiatives for women, to foster positive change and bridge the gender pay gap effectively. The study aims to take a comprehensive approach, with a primary focus on examining the viewpoints and perceptions of individuals in the tech industry to ascertain the relevance of existing tools and factors contributing to the gender pay gap. The research questions focus on comprehending the perspectives and perceptions of individuals rather than factual or objective data, with a particular focus on underlying mechanisms, career trajectories, promotion patterns, and effective policies and programs.

The thesis consists of two parts: a theoretical part with a literature overview on the gender pay gap, and an empirical part with semi-structured interviews of women and men working in tech companies.

2   GENDER PAY GAP IN THE TECH INDUSTRY

In the tech industry, gender pay disparities are especially pronounced, with women in the United States of America (US) earning, on average, 16 percent less than their male counterparts. Similarly, in the United Kingdom's (UK) tech sector, the gender pay gap stands

at 26 percent. Comparatively, Germany, the Netherlands, and France have relatively lower gaps than in the UK at 22 percent, 20 percent, and 15 percent, respectively, with France falling below the European average. Across the European tech industry, the average adjusted gender pay gap[1] is 1.6 percent. Among the European countries, the UK remains the worst performer with a gap of 2.2 percent, while the Netherlands stands out as the best performer with a gap of only 0.7 percent (National Partnership for Women and Families, 2021; 50inTech, 2023). Therefore, this chapter will begin by defining the gender pay gap and providing an overview of the glass ceiling, sticky floor, and leaking pipeline frameworks. It will then examine the various factors that contribute to the gender pay gap, such as biases in hiring and promotion, a lack of diversity in upper management, gender, and age stereotypes, and the negotiation gap. Finally, the chapter will review recent gender pay gap trends and their factors in the tech industry.

2.1 Historical Context of the Gender Pay Gap and Theoretical Perspectives

The gender pay gap is a phenomenon where men and women are paid differently for the same or similar work. One of the earliest papers that defined gender pay disparity and greatly contributed to further research was "The Disinherited Family: A Plea for Social Reform". In this work, she examined the economic problems faced by women, arguing that society is "disinherited women" and that their work is undervalued and underpaid. These statements were supported by the population censuses of 1921, which showed that the average weekly wage of women was only about two-thirds of the average weekly wage of men. Rathbone noted that this disparity was even greater for women who were the sole breadwinners of their families. She noted that women are often paid less than men for doing the same work, which she called "women's wages" (Rathbone, 1924).

2.1.1 Progress in Addressing Gender Pay Inequality

Another influential study was conducted in the United States in 1963 by a group of researchers at the President's Commission on the Status of Women. The report presented a comprehensive overview of women's economic, social, and political status in the United States at the time, and it identified several significant challenges women face. One of the main issues highlighted in the report was the gender pay gap. The report noted that women were generally paid less than men for doing the same work and that women's earnings tended to be lower than men's earnings overall. During that period, women were paid around 58 percent of what men received on average. The report's findings and recommendations helped to build support for policy changes aimed at promoting gender equality and addressing gender discrimination. One significant outcome of this was the passage of the Equal Pay Act in 1963, which was signed into law by President John F. Kennedy (Clinton White House

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[1] The adjusted pay gap is the pay disparity between men and women after considering other pay-related criteria including job level, seniority, education, experience, and performance into consideration.

Archives, 1998). The growing feminist movement and the activism of women's organizations, along with the European Convention on Human Rights, which established the principle of non-discrimination and equal treatment for all individuals, dated 1951 (European Convention on Human Rights, 1950), and different research and studies on gender pay inequality, for instance in the United Kingdom, a report, dated 1972 by the Royal Commission on Equal Pay highlighted the need for legislation to address gender pay discrimination stimulated the adoption of the Equal Pay Directive in 1975 by the European Union. The Equal Pay Directive established the principle of equal pay for equal work and required member states to take measures to eliminate any direct or indirect discrimination based on gender in terms of pay and other employment conditions. The directive also required member states to establish a framework for regular monitoring of pay and employment conditions to ensure compliance with the principle of equal pay (England, 2010; The International Labour Organization, 2015).

2.1.2   Understanding Gender Pay Disparities

Meanwhile, economists in the 1960s introduced the theory of human capital, which argues that differences in wages can be explained by differences in the characteristics and skills of workers, such as education, experience, and job tenure (Weiss, 2015). Blau and Kahn (2000) further built on this theory through extensive research on gender pay disparities. They classified the differences in earnings between men and women into "explained" and "unexplained" components. The explained component includes factors such as education, experience, occupation, industry, and union status, while the unexplained component is attributed to unobservable factors, which include discrimination. They have estimated the percentage of the gender pay gap that is attributed to the so-called "unexplained" factors. The study found that 41.1 percent of the pay gap is due to these unmeasurable factors, and some of it can be linked to discrimination, even if it is not always apparent or conscious. This unexplained portion of the pay gap is typically attributed to factors such as gender discrimination, bias in hiring and promotion, and differences in negotiation skills and assertiveness between men and women (Blau & Kahn, 2000; Blau & Kahn, 2017).

It is undeniable that until now, there has been a significant improvement in women's wages. In 1981, women had lower educational levels on average than men and were less likely to hold a bachelor's or advanced degree. Additionally, women had a lack of full-time work experience. However, by 2011, the educational gap had reduced, and the gap in full-time labor market experience had significantly decreased to 1.4 years (Blau & Koln, 2017). Despite this progress, when comparing men and women in the US with the same job title, level of seniority, and working hours, there still exists an 11 percent gender gap in take-home pay as of 2023. The controlled gender pay gap currently stands at 99 cents for every dollar earned by men (Haan, 2023). Hence, men who perform the same task and have the same experience and qualifications as women earn 1 dollar and women earn 99 cents.

Therefore, understanding and addressing the gender pay gap is crucial, and transparently reporting wages is one way to do so. The most common and inclusive method is to compare the annual earnings of full- and part-time workers, which recognizes the differences in pay and time spent at work, as well as unearned wages due to unpaid household and caregiving work. However, the gap can also be measured using median or mean earnings or by comparing the earnings of full-time or part-time workers. In some cases, the gap may be measured using other indicators of pay such as bonuses or stock option grants (European Parliament, 2020; Catalyst 2020; ILO & EC, 2018).

To comprehensively investigate the obstacles encountered by women in professional settings, the next section will scrutinize the systemic elements that underlie gender inequity with regard to recruitment, advancement, and leadership prospects.

2.2   Glass Ceiling, Sticky Floor, and Leaky Pipeline Concepts

Despite progress in increasing the proportion of women leaders in developed countries, women still face significant career obstacles, even if they are qualified and skilled. Recent research shows that women only make up 29 percent of managers in 2020, a slight increase from 25 percent in 2015 (Catalyst, 2022). However, the representation of women in management varies significantly across regions, industries, and intersectional factors. Among S & P 500 technology, media, and telecommunications companies, just 24.4 percent of senior positions are held by women (Lindsey White, 2020).

In North America, women make up 42 percent of managers, which is considerably higher than the representation in Asia, where they only make up 24 percent. Latin America and the Caribbean have the highest representation of women in management at 37 percent. This indicates a clear regional disparity in leadership positions for women (Glassdoor, 2016).

According to US. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the distribution of women in various industries in 2021 further illustrates the disparities in workforce representation. Women accounted for more than half of all workers in sectors such as education and health services (74.3%). On the contrary, they were substantially underrepresented in industries like manufacturing (29.2%), agriculture (28.0%), transportation and utilities (24.8%), mining (15.4%), and construction (11.0%). Financial activities (52.1%), leisure and hospitality (50.9%) both showed a balanced representation of the two genders (US. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023). In EU Member States, including Belgium and Spain, the gender pay gap in financial and insurance activities are higher than in the overall business economy. This gap ranged from 7 percent in Belgium to a staggering 37.5 percent in Czechia in 2021 (Statistics explained, 2023).

Looking at the breakdown by industries, we find the highest representation of women in management in education and health care, both at 45 percent. These sectors seem to provide more opportunities for women to take on leadership roles. On the other hand, industries like

energy and technology have the lowest representation of women in management, with only 20 percent and 24 percent, respectively (Glassdoor, 2016; Catalyst, 2022).

The current topic of discussion is the significant disparity in the percentage of women in high-level management positions and specific industries, despite both men and women possessing equivalent qualifications, skills, and advanced education. Recent research by Stoet and Geary (2018) reinforces the notion that females can have similar education and excel in similar studies. It reveals that girls often perform similarly or even better than boys on generic science literacy tests, showcasing their academic potential. Although boys may have higher absolute science scores in some cases, it is important to consider that their outperformance is relative to their overall academic average. In contrast, girls may score higher than boys in science but excel even more in reading, showcasing their diverse academic strengths. This research highlights that women can possess equivalent qualifications and skills as men, challenging the existing gender disparity in high-level management positions and specific industries.

The reason for this discrepancy can be attributed to gender segregation, where women face barriers to advancement both horizontally (in terms of job sectors and positions) and vertically (in terms of opportunities for career advancement within their chosen field) (Eurofond, 2017).

Merely examining horizontal and vertical segregation may not suffice, as the gender pay gap is an intricate and multi-dimensional phenomenon. Regardless of the organization we examine, there are customary practices and procedures that perpetuate disparities, strengthen them, and present them as unambiguous (Takács, 2018).

2.2.1   Glass Ceiling

The framework of a glass ceiling, sticky floor, and a leaking pipeline has been used to further clarify the pervasive and seemingly undeniable nature of gender inequality in the workforce. It was in 1986, in a Wall Street Journal report on women in corporate positions, that Hymowitz and Schellhardt first introduced the term "glass ceiling". This concept refers to obstacles that women encounter in their efforts to reach higher positions, along with higher pay, in various fields such as government, education, non-profit organizations, and corporations. The term can also apply to other groups, such as ethnic minorities and men, who face barriers to advancement (Hymowitz & Schellhardt, 1986).

Various theories propose that women face discrimination in organizations due to their gender. For instance, patriarchal theories suggest that men's desire to keep women dependent limits their employment opportunities, including access to top management positions. Kanter's theory of sex discrimination emphasizes the power of numbers and the desire for social certainty (Kanter, 1977). When considering candidates for top management positions, subjective appraisals favor individuals who are similar to the incumbents and decision-

makers (male candidates) and disadvantage those who are dissimilar (female candidates in male-dominated organizations) (Strober, 1984; Motowidlo, 1986). According to the theory of rational bias, gender discrimination occurs due to deliberate biases in decisions made by managers who prioritize their own interests and do not prioritize the elimination of gender discrimination or its consequences. Despite differing rationales, these theories agree that women face discrimination (Larwood et al., 1988).

Powell and Butterfield's (1994) study investigated the glass ceiling phenomenon by examining whether the gender of decision-makers affects the relationship between the gender of job applicants and promotion decisions for top management positions. The study's hypotheses, which suggested that women would be at a disadvantage in promotion decisions due to their gender, were rejected. Although there were small sample sizes, the gender of job applicants directly influenced panel evaluations and referral decisions in favor of men but did not directly influence the final selection. The gender of job applicants indirectly influenced panel evaluations and referrals through two job-relevant variables, employment in the hiring department and work experience, which both favored women. The gender of job applicants indirectly influenced selection through one job-relevant variable, the performance appraisal rating, which again favored women. The study found that the gender of decision-makers did not moderate the relationship between job applicants and promotion decision outcomes.

It is important to consider the specific characteristics of the organization that was examined, in this case, the federal government, as it differs from other organizations that have addressed the issue of gender-biased decision-making. In the federal government, there is a strong emphasis on procedural fairness when it comes to making promotions. This structured approach to decision-making allows for the identification of any decisions that may have been improperly made and holds decision-makers accountable for their promotion decisions (Powell & Butterfield,1994). While in some countries and industries, such as the finance and insurance industry in the United Kingdom, the gender pay gap at top management positions is particularly large. In other countries and industries, such as the public sector in Finland, the gender pay gap at top management positions is relatively small (Arulampalam et al., 2007). However, comparing gender pay gaps across different countries is challenging due to differences in the focus of studies. Many studies focus on large corporations or the public sector and exclude small and medium-sized enterprises. Additionally, the variation in occupational classifications and definitions of "manager" across countries adds to the complexity of cross-country comparisons. In some countries, the term "manager" may encompass a broad range of managerial positions in both the public and private sectors, including administrative staff below junior-level managers (ILO,2001).

2.2.2 Sticky Floor

Noble (1992) presented an important article on the "sticky floor," a concept that Catherine White Berheide had first proposed. This idea explained the difficulties women encounter in low-wage, immobile positions in state and local government. The "sticky floor" was created as a trap to keep women in these crucial positions, which are underpaid and don't provide many opportunities for career progression. According to the paper, this problem was even more important for women than the "glass ceiling" issue.

According to Laabs (1993), "sticky floors" refers to jobs that hinder women's advancement to higher positions in organizations, especially jobs that are vital for the smooth running of the organization and are typically occupied by women. This term refers to a situation where women are stuck in low-level jobs with lower wages, compensation, and few career advancement opportunities compared to equally qualified men who are promoted to higher positions. Shabsough et al. (2021) further support this notion.

To put it differently, the term "sticky floor" refers to low-paying jobs that lack prestige and provide limited opportunities for career advancement, such as clerical staff, stenographers, and data-entry operators. When women are employed in these roles, they are often overlooked for promotion, which hinders their ability to advance in their careers. As a result, many women never reach the highest levels of an organization, as they are held back by the "sticky floor" phenomenon (Guy, 1994).

Although both "glass ceiling" and "sticky floor" describe obstacles faced by women in their careers, they differ in their focus. The glass ceiling refers to the barriers that prevent women from reaching the highest positions in an organization, while the sticky floor highlights the obstacles faced by women stuck in lower and middle-level positions (Carli & Eagly, 2016; Fernandez & Campero,2017). Thus, the wage gap at the bottom of the hierarchy indicates the presence of a sticky floor, while the wider wage gaps at the top reflect a glass ceiling phenomenon (Carrillo et al., 2014; Shabsough et al., 2021).

Challenges faced early in women's careers are significant as they can have a side effect on later career stages, possibly resulting in barriers to advancement. Women may experience career setbacks early on that limit their ability to accumulate the necessary experience for promotion to higher-level positions later in their careers (Bjerk, 2008).

Still, recently, the common way to examine why men and women have different employment outcomes was to look at things like unfair treatment by employers and how family obligations affect them. But nowadays, there's a growing curiosity in understanding how people's personal characteristics and choices impact their career paths (Bowles et al., 2001; Reuben et al., 2015). For instance, risk preferences could play a part, as women tend to be more cautious than men and may avoid taking job-related risks, like the risk of losing their job or having unstable earnings, which can limit their career advancement (Hakim, 2011). Another example relates to the balance between work and family life. If men prioritize their

careers and find more satisfaction in achieving career-based status compared to family-related goals, they may have a stronger desire for promotions (Greenhaus et al., 2012; Azmat & Petrongolo, 2014). In line with this, Rong and Rounds (2015) found that men demonstrated significant interests in engineering-related fields and moderate interests in mathematical careers within Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM). Similarly, in the sciences, men showed moderate interests favoring Physical Sciences, while there were no significant differences in interests between genders in Biological Science and Medical Science. This highlights how STEM fields generally emphasize "things-orientation" (working with gadgets) and provide fewer opportunities for "people-orientation." Consequently, men tend to gravitate towards things-oriented fields, while women lean towards more people-oriented fields within STEM. The alignment between the percentage of women in most STEM fields and gender differences in basic interests suggests that preferences play an essential role in contributing to gender disparities. Interestingly, the level of qualitative ability did not significantly influence men and women's interests or representation in STEM. Instead, interests were found to play a critical role in early development, influencing individuals' learning processes and future career choices.

Deschacht et al.'s (2017) study suggests that young women professionals' lower likelihood of applying for jobs involving promotion in job content contributes to vertical sex segregation. Gender differences in preferences mediate this effect, with expected discrimination and job-related risk decreasing women's likelihood of applying for higher-level jobs. Organizations and policymakers should be aware of these factors. This finding resonates with Hede's (1994) view on the "sticky steps" phenomenon, which refers to the barriers that operate at every level and are equally unseen by men and women, contributing to women's under-representation in management.

2.2.3   Leaky Pipeline

The concept of the leaky pipeline suggests that women often enter certain industries or professions in similar numbers as men but drop out at various stages due to different barriers they face along the way. The leaks occur at various stages such as when students express interest in STEM careers but select other areas of study, change majors before graduation or leave the pipeline after graduating with a STEM degree. Women leak out more than men, creating a sex-based filter that removes one sex from the stream and leaves the other to arrive at the end of the pipeline. This results in the sex imbalance observed today in STEM and Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) fields (Blickenstaff, 2005; Dubois-Shaik et al., 2018).

Academic careers show gender segregation in different countries with an increase in the number of women entering higher education and science. In Switzerland, Iceland, and Slovenia, the number of women among full professors has more than doubled from 2004 to 2010, with Switzerland being the only country to reach the target of 25 percent women

among full professors, while Belgium and the Netherlands remain below 15 percent (Dubois-Shaik et al., 2018). However, the presence of the leaky pipeline phenomenon is evident in Slovenia as only 40 percent of women with completed Ph.D. studies reach assistant or assistant professor positions, and just 20 percent reach full professorship (Istenič, 2015).

Therefore, the leaky pipeline model combines the concepts of the glass ceiling and the sticky floor, highlighting the different stages and obstacles that women and underrepresented groups face in their careers.

2.3   Overview of Gender Representation in the Tech Industry

In a recent survey by Gartner, 86 percent of CIOs reported increased competition for qualified IT candidates, while 73 percent expressed concerns about talent attrition. The US, China, and the UK are expected to lose billions of dollars in potential revenue by 2030 due to skills shortages in the tech industry. Even Scandinavian countries, known for their successful tech startups, are facing a severe talent shortage, with Sweden predicted to have a 70,000 IT talent deficit by 2024. In Russia and Belarus, the tech market was once a major source of outsourced IT specialists, but due to sanctions imposed following aggression towards Ukraine, payments through the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunications (SWIFT) system have been cancelled, making it impossible to pay developers and outsourcing agencies (qubit-labs.com, 2022; Gartner, 2023).

Several prominent tech companies, including Twitter, Salesforce, Microsoft, and Meta, have laid off significant portions of their workforce in recent months. Twitter, for instance, let go of more than half its staff, while Salesforce gave notice to 10 percent of its workers, and Microsoft cut around 10,000 jobs. In March, Meta cut 10,000 jobs, having already eliminated 11,000 roles in November 2022. According to Gartner publicly available data suggests that more than half of Meta's job losses were among business professionals rather than technology jobs. Despite this, there is still a scarcity of talent in fields such as application development, AI, Python, software engineering, and enterprise cloud architecture (Gartner, 2023). Interestingly, despite the significant layoffs, laid-off workers in the tech industry seem to be finding new job opportunities quickly (Cambon & Guilford,2022). However, they have shifted their tactics and are now targeting more small and medium-sized companies. This trend suggests that while large tech corporations are undergoing workforce reductions, there remains a demand for skilled professionals in specialized technology fields, leading job seekers to explore opportunities in smaller companies to secure employment in their areas of expertise (Picciotto, 2023).

To address the current demand for employees in various industries, strategies such as diversifying the workforce, improving employee retention rates, and attracting young talents are being considered. The state of computer science education in the United States is in decline despite the increasing demand for technological expertise. Based on a report, there has been a decline in the availability of introductory and advanced credit computer science

courses in schools since 2005. Additionally, only nine states recognize computer science as a required math or science course, and two-thirds of states have minimal to no educational standards for computer science in secondary schools. Presently, computer science education is considered an elective or extracurricular activity in many high schools, with no states mandating coursework in the subject (Wilson et al., 2010). According to Blickenstaff (2005), in US parents, counsellors, and teachers stress the significance of traditional science courses, such as chemistry, to familiarize students with established sciences, which leads to higher success rates in college. This focus on traditional sciences can result in a decrease in students' interest in computer science courses, as they may prioritize the former. Ultimately, students may feel discouraged from pursuing computer science education due to a lack of prior experience and exposure to the field.

Moreover, the lack of familiarity of teachers, counsellors, and administrators with computing and computer science leads to problems in implementing computer science courses in the curriculum. This also contributes to the lack of awareness and encouragement for students to take these classes. Furthermore, primary, and secondary education teachers, many of whom are women, have low levels of Computer Science and IT training (Goode 2008; National Center for Women & Information Technology, 2012).

A study conducted with SAT exams found that high school students, regardless of gender, are less exposed to computer programming courses compared to computer literacy courses. The survey also revealed that over 60 percent of the 1.5 million students who did not have any high school computer coursework or experience were female. In summary, computer science education is often mistakenly equated with computer or technological literacy which solely focuses on the use of technology, rather than its creation (National Center for Women & Information Technology, 2012). This leads to confusion in distinguishing and advocating for programs that teach necessary 21st century computing skills for innovation and technological development. Educators and administrators may believe that computer literacy courses provide sufficient technological skills, but these courses are not comprehensive enough (PwC UK, 2017).

Interest in pursuing a Computer Science major among male and female college freshmen has been declining since the early 21st century (National Center for Women & Information Technology, 2012). The research of Master et al. (2021) investigates the gender-based assumptions that young children and teenagers have about their interest in STEM disciplines. The research found that most children think girls are less interested in computer science and engineering than boys. Since elementary school gender prejudices that STEM is solely for boys, many girls don't study computer science and engineering in high school because they feel like they don't belong. Most youngsters (63%) said girls are less interested in engineering than boys, and slightly over half (51%) said girls are less interested in computer science. Comparatively, 9 percent of kids claimed girls are more interested in engineering than boys are, and 14 percent of kids said girls are more interested in computer science than boys are.

Despite advancements in workplace equality, women are still significantly underrepresented in the technology workforce. According to PwC UK (2017) report, only 23 percent of people in STEM roles in the UK are women, and a mere 5 percent of leadership positions in the tech industry are held by women. The current pipeline of technology talent in the UK is also skewed towards men, with only 15.8 percent of engineering and technology undergraduates being women, which may lead to a shortage of skilled tech professionals in the future.

This gender imbalance is already starting to have an impact on organizations. According to McKinsey (2015) companies with more diverse workforces are capable of attracting top talent and enhancing their customer focus, employee contentment, and decision-making abilities. This, in turn, leads to a positive cycle of amplified gains. The benefits of workplace diversity are broad and encompassing, ranging from the ability to better connect with customers by reflecting a diverse society, to leveraging the unique strengths of underrepresented groups, such as women's skills in areas like problem-solving and emotional intelligence. A study found that 50 percent of the women surveyed consider the impact of their work as the most significant factor when choosing a career, compared to only 31 percent of men. In fact, women ranked the opportunity to make a difference in the world as the second most appealing aspect of a career, with only "engaging work" surpassing it (Hunt et al., 2015; PwC UK, 2017).

While technology companies are aiming to achieve workforce diversity, the proportion of women in their staff decreased by 2.1 percent compared to 2021 and reached 26 percent. However, 83.6 percent of tech companies are recognized for their efforts in hiring, training, and promoting diverse employees. While over 50 percent of medium-sized tech companies are leading in hiring women, the industry remains male-dominated. For instance, Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon, and Microsoft, despite being major tech organizations, the proportion of female employees in these companies is still relatively low. Moreover, the representation of women in technology-related positions is even lower, with Apple, Facebook, and Google employing only 23 percent women, while Microsoft employing only 20 percent (Statista 2018; Sonary, 2023).

The gender gap in companies and the industry is worsened by the departure of female professionals, which contributes to the widening of the gap. People leave their jobs for various reasons such as wanting career growth, higher pay, shorter commute, or a career change. However, unfair treatment is the primary cause of employee turnover, affecting all groups, with underrepresented professionals being affected the most, what consequently stimulates job hopping (National Center for Women & Information Technology, 2012). According to Kapor Center (2017) study, women of all backgrounds experienced and witnessed significantly more unfair treatment than men. Additionally, underrepresented men and women of color were twice as likely to experience stereotyping compared to White and Asian men and women. Underrepresented women of color had the highest rate of being passed over for promotion, with almost one-third experiencing it. Furthermore, one in ten women in the technology industry reported unwanted sexual attention.

Tech companies bear significant financial burdens due to the costly turnover resulting from an unfair workplace culture. When an employee departs, the company faces an average expense of $144,000 for full replacement, including an engineering hiring cost of approximately $17,000, in addition to other supplementary expenses (Kapor Center, 2017). Given that large tech companies typically pay engineers an average salary of $100,000, the financial repercussions of such turnover are indeed substantial (Glassdoor, 2023). Unfairness also causes reputational damage, with former employees being less likely to refer others to their former employer or recommend its products or services. Nearly 40 percent of tech employees leave their jobs due to unfairness, costing tech employers over $16 billion annually (lost productivity, recruiting costs, salary, etc.). A large tech company with a 37 percent turnover rate due to unfairness among 10,000 engineers and a 5 percent lower turnover rate would, for instance, lose $27 million per year (Kapor Center, 2017).

2.4 Factors Contributing to the Gender Pay Gap in the Tech Industry

As it was discussed earlier the gender pay gap remains a persistent issue across many industries, with women earning less than men for similar work. This disparity is particularly evident in male-dominated fields such as technology, where women's representation remains low, and the gender pay gap is more pronounced. There are several reasons for this gap, including sex differences in vocational interests, social and occupational segregation, which results in women being underrepresented in higher-paying roles and industries. In this discussion, we will explore the factors that contribute to the gender pay gap, with a particular focus on social and occupational segregation.

2.4.1 Non-structural Factors Contributing to the Gender Pay Gap in the Tech Industry

The lack of promotion of tech and STEM jobs by teachers can have a social impact on girls' decisions to choose a career in tech. In fact, studies have shown that the socialization process, including the attitudes of parents, teachers, peers, and the media, can influence girls' interests and career aspirations in STEM fields (National Science Foundation, 2017).

Initially, the computer science courses and programs at school do not arouse the interest and desire of students to pursue careers in this industry. And although some countries, such as the USA, have made improvements to the curriculum, computer science courses continue to be irrelevant and not engaging for female students (Anderson, et al., 2008; Goode, 2007). According to a PwC UK (2017) report, their main reasons for not choosing to study STEM topics are not finding STEM subjects interesting and that teachers are not making STEM subjects appealing. Even though the female students were able to achieve passing grades on exams in STEM subjects, they discovered that they did not derive the same level of enjoyment from STEM classes as they did from classes where the emphasis was on crafting arguments, rather than arriving at a single, "correct" answer (National Center for Women & Information Technology, 2012). In line with this Rong et al. (2009) study reveals significant

sex differences in vocational interests, with men gravitating towards things-oriented careers and women towards people-oriented ones. Men have more realistic (interest in working with things and gadgets) and investigative interests, while women have more artistic, social (interest in working with people and helping people), and conventional interests. These differences may contribute to gender disparity in STEM fields, as STEM areas are often perceived as better matches for individuals with things-oriented interests.

The reason behind this phenomenon can be attributed to the fact that the teaching of computing often takes place in a theoretical and detached manner, which prevents students from recognizing how technology can be used to address relevant social issues (PwC UK, 2017). Such a curriculum also reinforces the notion that computing is a solitary and machine-centric set of tasks, according to various studies. Moreover, educational institutions and industries are falling short in exposing young people, particularly girls, to the realities of technology, jobs, and careers in today's world. Technology careers require a high level of creativity, especially in understanding human behavior and developing digital user experiences (Clayton et al., 2009; Papastergiou, 2008).

The survey found that a significantly lower percentage of female respondents would consider a career in technology, with only 27 percent indicating interest compared to 62 percent of male respondents. Furthermore, only 3 percent of female respondents chose a career in technology as their first choice, compared to 15 percent of males, and a smaller percentage of females saw technology as one of their potential career options (PwC UK, 2017). Women who had opted for careers in computing, as revealed by interview research, attributed the importance of courses that linked computing activities to real-life experiences of girls in correcting their misconceptions and changing their attitudes towards computing careers. These women recommended that such courses should be a crucial part of initiatives aimed at increasing girls' interest in technology (Taegue, 2022).

Media is another factor that has a social impact on how women perceive STEM and IT-related jobs. The portrayal of computer professionals as socially awkward geeks who do tedious and solitary work in the media persists, according to National Center for Women & Information Technology (2012). Although there are attempts to rebrand the term "geek" as something cool, like Best Buy Co.'s Geek Squad or girl geek websites and events, this approach can also have a negative impact on many girls' views of IT and computing, as noted by Barker and Aspray (2006) and Cheryan et al. (2011a).

The survey reveals a significant difference between men and women in their approach to career decisions. According to the survey results, women tend to rely more on a support system for advice, including but not limited to recruitment agencies, mentors, peers, household members, affiliation groups, and line managers. On the other hand, men tend to rely more on their own self-confidence along with their network of contacts when making career decisions (PwC UK, 2017; Women Forum, 2022). As an instance, according to Barron's (2004) study, about 75 percent of female students who enrolled in a programming

course were motivated to do so by their family members, whereas only 32 percent of male students reported such encouragement from their families.

Occupational segregation is another factor that contributes to the gender pay gap in tech. According to Faulkner (2009), science is not neutral with respect to gender, but rather perpetuates male culture. The fields of information and communication technology (ICT) and digital technology are typically seen as male-dominated, making it difficult for women to break in and they may face multiple barriers.

Women face challenges in the field of technology from an early age and throughout their entire career trajectory. To illustrate, educators and other adults often hold biases regarding who they believe has an aptitude for computing (National Center for Women & Information Technology, 2012). Some teachers perpetuate the idea that while girls work hard, boys have a natural ability or greater interest and skill with computers (Barker & Aspray, 2006; Voyles et al., 2007). These perceptions and interactions are crucial because perceived support from teachers directly affects girls' interest in computing classes and careers.

The belief that science and computing are for boys is prevalent among both teachers and students. Boys often dominate the classroom, which can make it uncomfortable for girls. Many girls feel uncomfortable being the only girl in a class or group (Goodle, 2006; Goodle 2007). Research suggests that having male family members in computing careers reinforces the stereotype of technology as a masculine field. Studies show that male and female students perceive computer science as a primarily male field, leading them to make career choices accordingly (Modi, et al., 2012). Moreover, a shortage of female role models and a lack of awareness contribute to females' self-selecting out of tech jobs, perpetuating the gender gap in the industry. For instance, 83 percent of female respondents find it impossible to name a role model, compared to 59 percent of male respondents. While 66 percent of respondents can name a renowned male working in technology, merely 22 percent of respondents can name a renowned female working in technology. Additionally, a higher percentage of females (12%) than males (8%) feel that there aren't enough good role models for them in tech (PwC UK, 2017).

To put it differently, gender stereotypes and cultural norms can result in discrimination against women based on perceptions of their performance and productivity, which is known as "statistical discrimination" theory (Phelps, 1972). This can lead to subjective evaluations of female job candidates being influenced by the assumption that they have more household responsibilities and less commitment, which overrides their actual skills (Castaño & Webster, 2011). Research has shown that employers in the ICT sector hold stereotypical views about the availability, commitment, and skills of female employees, which results in segregation and lower wages for women in this industry (European Commission, 2013).

The dual-labor theory explains how gender stereotypes contribute to job segregation in the labor market, resulting in primary jobs that are male-dominated with higher qualifications

and better working conditions, and secondary jobs that are associated with female stereotypes and have lower qualifications and worse working conditions (Glover & Guerrier, 2010). In the ICT sector, this segregation is reflected in the split between technical and non-technical profiles, with women more likely to gravitate towards the latter. These hybrid jobs, which require both technological and communication skills, are often presented as opportunities for women, but they are undervalued and contribute to task segregation between male and female jobs (Hüsing et al., 2015). Women also face challenges in advancing in their careers due to the "glass ceiling" and "sticky floor" effects, resulting in lower promotion prospects and wages. In the ICT sector, women are underrepresented in management positions, and the masculine organizational culture and lack of role models further exacerbate the gender imbalance (Arroyo & Valenduc, 2016).

2.4.2   Structural Factors Contributing to the Gender Pay Gap in the Tech Industry

Belgorodskiy et al. (2012) argue that the traditional employment model, which assumes men as breadwinners, reinforces the idea of women's secondary role in the labor market. This idea has a direct impact on women's career development and wages, as gendered family planning and maternity leave lead to discrimination in pay and promotion. Women are more likely than men to take on caregiving responsibilities, leading to career interruptions, reduced work hours, lower earnings, and limited career progression opportunities. Additionally, women who take career breaks to care for children or family members face long-term career penalties, such as reduced earnings and fewer opportunities for advancement.

On the other hand, Hegewisch and Gornick (2011) suggest that work-family policies, including paid parental leave, flexible work arrangements, and affordable childcare, have the potential to mitigate the negative impact of caregiving responsibilities on women's employment and earnings. These policies can help women balance their family responsibilities with their career aspirations and maintain their connection to the labor market. However, the duration of leave is critical as longer leaves can lead to a decline in relative wages for women. According to research conducted by Bertrand et al. (2010), Ruhm (1998), and Waldfogel (1999), absences from work up to six months do not have a significant impact on wages. In addition, the studies indicate that women tend to take their leave in one continuous block, while men take smaller breaks and remain somewhat connected to their job during their absence. The availability of leaves and reduced-hour work options also affect employers' behavior. If these options are widely available and generous, employers may statistically discriminate against women in hiring and advancement, as women are more likely to take up the options they are entitled to. Employers often discriminate against highly skilled workers as they view their temporary or occasional absences as the most difficult to handle. Moreover, women are often assigned less strategic roles due to this discriminatory behavior (Hegewisch & Gornick, 2011).

One of the main challenges for women is the difficulty of balancing work and personal life, which is particularly challenging for women due to the added pressure of family responsibilities. Women are more likely to take time off work or work part-time to care for their children, which can result in less work experience, slower career progression, and lower earnings (Takács, 2018). Many companies have so named "coke and pizza" work culture that encourages employees to work long hours to meet project deadlines, which can make it difficult for women to prioritize their family commitments. As a result, women may have to sacrifice time with their families or leave their jobs altogether (Griffiths & Moore, 2006; Anderson et al., 2008).

" My reality is messy: from the triumphs of reaching a work milestone to tears over a missed school event or a cancelled dinner date with a friend because my flight home got delayed, again…"- says Rachel Mushahwar, a Vice President and General Manager at Intel for Forbes (Caprino, 2019).

Another factor contributing to the gender pay gap is the lack of negotiation skills among women. Research has shown that women often feel uncomfortable negotiating their salary or benefits, leading to lower initial job offers and slower salary growth over time. This is compounded by the fact that women may be penalized for negotiating, while men are rewarded (Babcock & Laschever, 2003).

According to Farrow (2021), in the tech industry, women earn on average 17 percent less than men, and this gap is predicted to remain until 2050. Compared to men, women are less likely to negotiate their salary or ask for a raise, with a four-fold disparity between the two genders. Even when women do request a raise, they typically ask for 30 percent less than their male counterparts. Additionally, women are less inclined to assert themselves during meetings. While 71 percent of men will only consider changing jobs if it comes with a pay increase, only 20 percent of women share the same sentiment. Women's lower negotiating skills have been identified as one of the reasons for this gap, with women often being less likely to negotiate their salaries and benefits than men. There are several reasons behind this difference in negotiation behavior, which have been studied by linguistics, social sciences, genetics, evolutionary psychology, and economics. For example, studies have shown that men and women use language differently, with women using more tentative language and men using more assertive language (Takács, 2018). This can lead to women being perceived as less confident or competent in negotiation situations, even if they have the same qualifications and experience as male counterparts (Babcock & Laschever, 2003).

Furthermore, organizations may unintentionally discriminate against women during hiring processes by measuring language use in male "norms" and interpreting differences as weaknesses (Takács, 2018). This can result in qualified women being passed over for jobs, which is not only unfair but also has economic consequences for companies. Research has shown that diverse teams perform better and generate more revenue (Farrow, 2021).

2.5   EU Policies for Gender Pay Gap and Gender Equality

The European Union (EU) has been committed to fostering gender equality and addressing the gender pay gap across all aspects of society. To achieve this vision, the EU has implemented a range of policies and initiatives aimed at promoting equal opportunities, combating discrimination, and empowering women. This section explores key EU policies and initiatives dedicated to advancing gender equality, ensuring economic independence, and creating a more inclusive and equitable society.

2.5.1   Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025

The Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, launched by the European Commission, is a comprehensive policy designed to advance gender equality across all areas of life. The primary aim of this strategy is to create a fair and inclusive society where men and women have equal opportunities to participate fully in all aspects of society, including the workforce, education, and decision-making processes.

One of the key goals of the Gender Equality Strategy is to ensure economic independence for everyone, regardless of gender. It seeks to address the gender pay gap, where women often earn less than men for the same work or work of equal value. By promoting equal pay for equal work and addressing wage disparities, the strategy aims to empower women economically and reduce financial inequalities between genders.

The Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 will also work towards dismantling gender stereotypes and traditional gender roles. It recognizes that preconceived notions about gender can limit opportunities for both men and women. By challenging these stereotypes, the strategy seeks to break down barriers and promote greater freedom in career choices and life decisions.

Furthermore, the strategy encourages employers to adopt flexible working arrangements that accommodate the diverse needs of their employees. Potential alternatives for work arrangements may encompass remote work, flexible scheduling, job-sharing, and part-time employment.

The Gender Equality Strategy promotes initiatives that encourage equal parenting between men and women. Currently this involves providing resources and support to fathers, such as parenting workshops and information about their rights to parental leave. The obligation of paternity leave varies from country to country and depends on the specific laws and regulations in each jurisdiction. In some countries, paternity leave is mandatory and is provided as a legal entitlement to fathers or partners following the birth or adoption of a child. On the other hand, in some countries, paternity leave is not mandatory, and its availability may depend on individual company policies or collective bargaining agreements. For instance, in Slovenia paternity leave is not transferable. Fathers are entitled

to 30 calendar days of leave, and this can be extended to 40 days for twins or 50 days for triplets (GOV.SI, n.d). Also, strategy advocates to encourage fathers' involvement in caregiving. This means providing fathers with equal opportunities to take time off from work to care for their newborns and young children.

Moreover, it highlights the importance of accessible and affordable childcare services. By investing in quality childcare facilities, the strategy aims to support parents, especially women, in participating in the workforce while knowing that their children are well taken care of (European Comission, 2020).

2.5.2   Gender Pay Gap Reporting

The new legislation adopted by the European Parliament takes a significant step towards addressing the gender pay gap and promoting gender equality in the EU. The regulations would mandate that employers provide transparency on salary information, facilitating employees' ability to compare compensation and uncover gender-based pay disparities.

To ensure fairness and equality, pay structures will need to be based on gender-neutral criteria, including job evaluation and classification systems. Vacancy notices and job titles will also have to be gender-neutral, and recruitment processes must be non-discriminatory.

If pay reporting reveals a gender pay disparity of no less than 5 percent, it will become mandatory for employers to engage in a collaborative pay evaluation with their employees' representatives. To enforce compliance, member states will need to implement effective and proportionate penalties, such as fines, for companies that infringe the rules. Workers who have suffered harm due to an infringement will have the right to claim compensation.

One of the crucial aspects of the new legislation is the prohibition of pay secrecy. Workers and workers' representatives will have the right to access clear and complete information about their specific pay level and the average pay levels, broken down by gender, for categories of workers doing the same as them or work of equal value to theirs. Pay secrecy is no longer allowed, and contractual terms that restrict workers from disclosing their pay or seeking information about others' pay is prohibited (McCann FitzGerald, 2023).

The legislation also shifts the burden of proof on pay-related issues from the worker to the employer. In cases where a worker believes that equal pay principles have not been applied, the employer will be obligated to prove that there was no discrimination (European Parliament, 2023).

2.5.3   The Women on Boards Directive

The Women on Boards Directive is a policy aimed at increasing the representation of women on corporate boards within the European Union (EU). The directive was proposed by the

European Commission in 2012 with the primary goal of promoting gender equality in decision-making positions and addressing the underrepresentation of women on corporate boards.

The directive sets a specific target for non-executive directors, aiming for a minimum of 40 percent representation of women on corporate boards by a specified date (European Parliament, 2012). This target applies to publicly listed companies operating within the EU.

The directive recognizes that despite women making up a significant portion of the workforce, they are often underrepresented in top leadership positions, including corporate boards. The policy aims to break down the barriers that hinder women's progress in reaching these leadership roles and increase gender diversity in decision-making processes.

By 2026, companies will need to have 40 percent of the underrepresented sex among non-executive directors or 33 percent among all directors Companies will be required to make appointments based on a comparative analysis of the qualifications of candidates by applying clear, gender-neutral, and unambiguous criteria to ensure fair and transparent selection procedures for candidates for board positions. Additionally, it will be necessary to ensure that applicants are evaluated objectively based on their individual merits, regardless of gender (European Commission 2022).

3   RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter of master's thesis focuses on the research methodology and approach employed in studying the gender pay gap in the tech industry. The chapter begins with a discussion of the research design and approach, highlighting the use of semi-structured interviews as the data collection method and content analysis as the data analysis method. The chapter further delves into the sampling process, including the criteria for selecting participants and participant demographics. The section on data collection covers the recruitment of participants, the informed consent process, and the conduct of semi-structured interviews. Finally, the chapter concludes with a detailed discussion of the data analysis process, including data preparation and organization, coding, and categorization. Overall, this chapter aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the research design and approach utilized in this study of the gender pay gap in the tech industry.

3.1   Research Design and Approach.

This research involved a qualitative data collection method, since it is a valuable approach for exploring complex and nuanced social phenomena and is particularly useful when trying to understand the experiences, perceptions, and attitudes of individuals or groups (Silverman, 2015; Miles et al., 2018). Given the focus of this research on capturing the perspectives and insights of people working in the tech industry regarding the gender pay

gap, a qualitative method is particularly well-suited to the task. While qualitative data can provide objective information on the size and scope of the pay gap, it may not fully capture the experiences and attitudes of those affected by it. Instead, a qualitative approach allows for a deeper exploration of the underlying mechanisms and subjective perceptions that contribute to the issue. As such, the main research questions for this study will primarily focus on understanding perspectives and perceptions, rather than factual or objective data. Specifically, the main research questions will be:

RQ 1: What are the underlying mechanisms that drive the gender pay gap in the tech industry, and how do individuals in the industry perceive these mechanisms?

RQ 2: How do career trajectories and promotion patterns differ between men and women in the tech industry, and how do these differences contribute to the gender pay gap?

RQ 3: What are the most effective policies and programs that companies in the tech industry can implement to reduce the gender pay gap, and how do individuals in the industry perceive the effectiveness of these policies and programs?

The primary data research will involve interviews with male and female individuals from the tech industry to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences, perspectives, and attitudes related to the gender pay gap topic. This will help to provide a more in-depth understanding of the gender pay gap topic from male and female perspective (Silverman, 2015).

The interviews were conducted using an abductive approach, which involves a flexible and iterative process of reasoning. The data analysis focused on identifying emerging themes and patterns, allowing for new insights to emerge. While a preliminary structure based on the literature review provided a starting point for the analysis, the abductive approach allowed for exploration of unexpected findings and the refinement of the theoretical framework based on the interview data. To ensure the rigor and consistency of the analysis, a systematic approach was used. This involved a structured process for analyzing the data, which included organizing the data, identifying themes, and developing codes to categorize the data (Hox & Boeije, 2005). These approaches aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the experiences, perceptions, and attitudes of stakeholders, in this case employees, in the tech industry related to the gender pay gap and help to ensure that the findings are reliable, valid, and representative of the collected data.

3.1.1   Selection of Semi-structured Interviews as a Data Collection Method

The choice of data collection method is critical to ensuring the research objectives are met. In this study, semi-structured interviews were selected as the primary data collection method due to their ability to provide rich and detailed information on individuals' experiences, attitudes, and perceptions of the gender pay gap in the tech industry.

Semi-structured interviews offer flexibility in questioning and allow participants to provide detailed responses in their own words (Bryman, 2016). This flexibility allows for the interviewer to follow up and probe on interesting responses and topics that emerge during the interview, which is essential in capturing the unique perspectives of participants.

Moreover, semi-structured interviews provide a balance between structure and openness, allowing for consistency in the interview process while still allowing participants to express themselves freely (Bryman, 2016). The use of open-ended questions ensures that participants are not restricted to predetermined categories or themes and can freely express their experiences and perceptions of the gender pay gap in the tech industry.

Therefore, the selection of semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection method aligns with the research objectives of gaining a deep understanding of the experiences, attitudes, and perceptions of individuals in the tech industry related to the gender pay gap.

3.1.2   Content Analysis as the Data Analysis Method

Content analysis was chosen as the data analysis method for this study because it allowed for a systematic and rigorous examination of textual data. According to Krippendorff (2018), content analysis is "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context by systematically classifying and interpreting (often qualitative) text material" (p. 16). In other words, it was a way to analyze text data in a way that is both objective and comprehensive.

Moreover, content analysis was an effective method for exploring patterns and themes in large amounts of textual data (Miles et al., 2014). By using content analysis, this study aimed to identify recurring themes related to the experiences, perceptions, and attitudes of female and male individuals in the tech industry towards the pay discrepancies.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the content analysis, the study followed a systematic approach by first conducting a thorough reading of the interview transcripts to gain a comprehensive understanding of the data. To capture both anticipated and emergent themes, a coding scheme was developed. This coding scheme consisted of pre-determined codes and categories based on the research questions, as well as allow for the incorporation of emerging themes from the data (Krippendorff, 2018). During the coding process, codes and categories were assigned to segments of text that represented both the pre-determined concepts and the emergent ones, ensuring a comprehensive analysis of the data. The coding process involved assigning codes to segments of text that represented a particular concept or idea related to the research questions.

Overall, content analysis provided a systematic and objective method for analyzing large amounts of textual data, making it an appropriate method for this study. By using content

analysis, this study aimed to identify and analyze patterns and themes related to the gender pay gap from the perspectives of female and male individuals in the tech industry.

3.2 Sampling

In this study, the sampling strategy used was purposeful sampling, which was a non-probability sampling technique that involved selecting participants based on specific criteria that were relevant to the research question (Krippendorff, 2018). The purpose of using purposeful sampling was to ensure that the participants were representative of the population of interest and were able to provide relevant information for the research question.

3.2.1 Criteria for Selecting Participants

The criteria for selecting participants in this study were individuals who were currently employed in the tech industry and had experience or knowledge about the pay discrepancy. Specifically, the inclusion criteria were:

- Have a job position that is related to the technology industry, either in a tech company or in another field, such as finance, healthcare, or education.
- Have knowledge or experience related to the gender pay gap.
- Represent diverse gender identities.
- Represent diverse job titles and seniority and have a minimum of 5 years of work experience.

The first two criteria ensured that the participants had relevant knowledge and experience related to the research question. The third criterion aimed to ensure that the perspectives of individuals from diverse gender identities were represented in the study. Finally, the fourth criterion aimed to ensure that the participants represented a range of job titles and seniority levels in the tech industry. To ensure diversity and inclusivity, participants were selected from different regions and countries.

3.2.2 Participant Demographics

The final sample size depended on the saturation of data, which refers to the point at which no new information is being generated from the data (Krippendorff, 2018). Demographic information was collected from the participants, including gender identity, job title, seniority level, industry, and years of experience in the tech industry as shown in Table 1. To ensure diverse range of perspectives and insights participants were recruited from different neighbouring countries. For the purpose to gather a diverse and thorough pool of information, even though some participants worked for the same company, they were based in different countries and had distinct positions.

Table 1: Sample characteristics

Code	Participant's gender	Industry	Participant's position	Experience years	Country	Weekly work hours
Participant 1	Female	Blockchain	Program Chair	17	Slovenia	40
Participant 2	Female	Technology consultancy	Software Engineer	5	Slovenia	40
Participant 3	Female	Security	QA Engineer	6	Czech Republic	40
Participant 4	Female	Research & Education in Informatics	Assistant Professor	16	Slovenia	50
Participant 5	Female	Digital transformation	Project Assistant	5	Slovenia	40
Participant 6	Female	Gaming	Manager Software-Release	16	Serbia	40
Participant 7	Male	Web services	Full Stack Web Developer	15	Slovenia	50
Participant 8	Male	Technology consultancy	Technical Advisor	15	Slovenia	50
Participant 9	Male	Software Development	Director Engineering	12	Slovenia	40
Participant 10	Male	Gaming	Senior Software Engineer	6	Slovenia	40
Participant 11	Male	Banking	Data Science-Consultant	20	Slovenia	50
Participant 12	Female	IT services and IT consulting	Delivery Manager	20	Serbia	40
Participant 13	Female	IT services and IT consulting	Data Discipline Lead Slovenia	10	Slovenia	40

Source: Own work.

3.3   Data Collection

In this study, the data was collected through individual interviews with female and male tech professionals, and recruitment of participants was a crucial part of the research process. The aim was to obtain a diverse range of perspectives from participants who are currently working in the tech industry.

3.3.1 Recruitment of Participants

The participants for this study were recruited through various means, including social media platforms like LinkedIn and Facebook, as well as through organizations such as the Digital Innovation Hub, Future Females, Ljubljana.tech, Slovenian Digital Coalition and so on. Additionally, international participants were recruited through professional networks and personal contacts, with no restrictions on the country of origin. The snowball method was also utilized, with participants encouraged to refer others who may be interested in taking part in the study.

To ensure a diverse range of perspectives, both male and female participants were recruited for the study. This approach provided a balanced understanding of the gender pay gap in the tech industry, as it affected both genders.

3.3.2 Informed Consent Process

Before participating in the study, all potential interviewees received information about the purpose of the research, the data collection methods, and the use of the data. They were asked to provide e-mail address to receive a consent form, which was provided to them in advance. The example of consent form can be found in Appendix 2.

The informed consent form outlined participants' rights, including the right to withdraw from the study at any time and the right to ask for their data to be removed from the study. Participants were also informed that all data kept confidential and that their identities are protected.

Overall, the recruitment of participants and the informed consent process was conducted with the utmost professionalism and in accordance with ethical standards to ensure the validity and reliability of the data collected.

3.3.3 Conducting Semi-structured Interviews

The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed with the help of the Transcribe and Dictate function in Microsoft Word for research purposes to analyze the data accurately. The interviewer/researcher were asked open-ended questions to elicit participants' experiences and perceptions of the gender pay gap in the tech industry. An example of the interview guide can be found in Appendix 3. The interviews took approximately 40-50 minutes, and participants were free to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence.

The interviewer/researcher was maintaining strict confidentiality throughout the study and ensured that all data collected were stored securely on a password-protected computer accessible only to the interviewer/researcher.

3.4   Data Analysis

In this study, data analysis was conducted manually. Specifically, each interview was carefully reviewed by the interviewer/researcher to ensure the accuracy of attitude recognition among the participants. This chapter focuses on two main aspects: data preparation and organization, and the coding and categorization process.

3.4.1   Data Preparation and Organization

The interviews were transcribed using Microsoft Word's Transcribe function. Each interview contained approximately 9-12 A4 (on average 5000 words, single space) pages. After transcription, the interviewer/researcher carefully proofread the interviews to identify any potential confidentiality violations as outlined in the consent form, such as the mention of company names or participant names. If any violations were detected, they were replaced with a code for names and the industry for company names. Additionally, efforts were made to eliminate redundancy by reviewing the grammar, punctuation, and removing repetitive words within the interviews, while ensuring that none of the original words were removed or changed. The transcripts can be accessed upon request.

To identify the themes discussed in the interviews, the Microsoft Word's New Comment function was utilized. The process involved reading and analyzing the response for each question, identifying themes within the text. Whenever a sentence indicated a predetermined theme or introduced a new topic, it was highlighted, and a new comment was created. The theme name was then written in the comment section. Subsequently, these comments were extracted to Microsoft Excel using a VBA (Visual Basic for Applications) function. VBA allowed to automate tasks and create custom function and macros within Excel (Bashir et al., 2020). This allowed for a comprehensive review of all the topics covered in the 13 interviews, following a top-down approach. In this study, the top-down approach refers to categorizing all the identified topics into themes and subthemes, that could be found in Appendix 5.

3.4.2   Coding and Categorization Process

The coding and categorization process involved identifying and organizing key themes related to the gender pay gap. Initially, certain themes were predetermined based on theoretical research, including social (Kanter, 1977; National Center for Women & Information Technology, 2012) and cultural (Phelps, 1972) pressures, occupational segregation (Faulkner 2009), lack of promotion of tech and STEM by teachers (National Science Foundation, 2017), lack of engagement in computer science courses by females (Anderson, et al., 2008; Goode, 2007), perception of computing as a primarily male field (Modi, et al., 2012), stereotypical views, and biases in evaluations of female job candidates (Castaño & Webster, 2011), impact of maternity leave and caregiving (Belgorodskiy et al.

2012), lack of negotiation skills (Blau & Kahn, 2000; Blau & Kahn, 2017), difficulty in balancing work and personal life (Takács, 2018).

During the interview analysis followed by coding process, new themes emerged within each main theme, reflecting different insights and perspectives. To better capture the nuances, each theme was further broken down into relevant subthemes. It should be noted that some subthemes were repetitive across themes but carried slightly different meanings based on the specific context. Therefore, clear definitions and examples were added to ensure accurate representation and understanding.

By employing this coding and categorization process, a comprehensive exploration of the factors contributing to the gender pay gap was achieved, shedding light on the complex dynamics and challenges faced by women in the workforce.

4 RESULTS AND INTERPRETATIONS

This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the qualitative study's findings, delving into the key themes and subthemes that emerged from the analysis. This chapter not only presents the findings but also provides a deeper understanding through the interpretations supported by examples derived from transcriptions. By integrating the findings, interpretations, and supporting examples, this chapter offers a robust and comprehensive understanding of the qualitative data. It provides a deeper exploration of the key themes and subthemes, offering valuable insights into their implications and potential applications within the research field.

4.1 Cultural and Social Pressures

Cultural and social pressures' theme explores the various factors that influence, and shape individuals' career choices based on traditional bias, family and social media influence, and the role of teachers and acquaintances. It delves into the impact of societal norms and gender biases on perceiving certain career paths as suitable for men or women. Additionally, it examines how family members and social media platforms contribute to shaping societal expectations and perceptions regarding gender-specific career choices.

The participants in the study highlighted the influence of cultural and social pressures on career choices in the tech industry. They recognized traditional biases in society that shape perceptions of suitable career paths for men and women. Participant 1 mentioned, *"Slovenia is former Yugoslavia. Still, we are very in touch with the Balkans and yes, this also influenced Slovenia. It is still perceived that the girl should have more caring roles that are something connected with education and so on, and the boys are for maybe STEM, software and so on."*

Participants also acknowledged the societal pressure to make safe career choices based on traditional gender roles and expectations. Participant 5 mentioned, *"They go with the safe choices, you know, for girls, especially if you want to go study engineering, it's 80 percent like your mom will be: 'But are you sure? Wouldn't you go like English or something that it's not enegineerig?'"*

The participants recognized that gender biases and stereotypes start early in childhood and can affect career choices throughout adulthood. Participant 10 noted, *"Probably the parents never actually endorse those wishes from girls. I think this starts at a very, very early age. Boys will play with guns and cars and girls will play with dolls. And it's probably it, it's propagating these things to adulthood, so it affects career choices."*

Social pressures, including family, social media, teachers, acquaintances, and peer influence, were identified as factors that shape societal expectations and perceptions regarding gender-specific career choices. Participant 4 mentioned, *"I wanted to go to secondary school to study computer science, I had people around me who said no, this is for boys. You shouldn't do it. You should just go to a general high school where you will have broader education."*

4.2 Role Models

The theme of "Role Model" explores the influential figures who inspire individuals to pursue careers in technology-related fields. It encompasses family members, like parents or siblings, who act as role models and ignite interest in technology-related careers. Additionally, the theme sheds light on the role of educators, particularly professors and teachers, who serve as inspirational figures and motivate students to consider careers in computer science or technology.

Role models were identified as influential figures who inspire interest in technology-related fields. Family members, such as parents or siblings, were mentioned as role models. Participant 6 shared, *"It was my dad. I did the same study that he studied at the university. I can't say that he was a role model. I believe that I was just interested in his dealing with computers, and it was just something new, different, and fascinating. A toy that other kids didn't have, so I just started playing with that toy."*

The positive influence of teachers, classmates, and community members was also acknowledged, but solely by male participants. Participant 13 mentioned, *"So I started to study philosophy and theology after high school and then basically one of the role models that got me into mathematics was my high school schoolmate because he went to study mathematics in the first place. And when we were hanging out at his place, I asked: "Can you show me your books, your scripts. What do you do?" And then I was so intrigued that I said: I'm going to try it as well."*

4.3   Job Application and Hiring Insights

Insights into job application and hiring theme include factors like company culture, perfect match inclination, experience, matching objectives, skill assessment bias, and inaccurate requirements. These insights highlight the influence of company image, personal preferences, and potential biases in the hiring process.

The job application and hiring process is a dynamic and multifaceted endeavour that involves various factors and considerations. Through an analysis of interviews valuable insights have been gained regarding this complex landscape. The decision to apply for a position in the tech industry is influenced by several factors, even when candidates don't meet all the requirements. One common reason, regardless of gender, is the recognition that job requirements often include numerous criteria that are difficult to fulfil, even for experienced professionals. Candidates emphasize the importance of identifying and matching the essential criteria, understanding that perfection is rare. As one participant stated, *"You should apply, even if you don't meet all the criteria. I mean, nobody is really perfect. Usually, it comes down to which criteria are really important for a job. What I see is that the companies, when they're looking for staff, are listing so many usually unnecessary things there"* (Participant 1). This highlights the need to focus on the relevant requirements and disregard those that are not crucial.

Another observation made by participants is that meeting all the position requirements is often unrealistic. As expressed by Participant 12, *"You never meet all the position requirements. I mean, they're written so that nobody ever meets every, every, every line."* Additionally, participants emphasized that certain industry-specific skills are difficult to acquire through traditional education. They emphasize the importance of learning on the job, stating, *"there are so many things written there that companies want and if you don't do it, you cannot learn it. You learn when you do the projects; you cannot learn it in any school"* (Participant 5).

Participants also highlighted the significance of conveying motivation to learn and having a strong foundation to hiring managers. As Participant 10 mentioned, *"so, I would apply because of my motivation to learn new things. I can learn new things, and I will be able to do my job."* This sentiment was echoed by Participant 12, who explained that employers expect candidates to have the necessary foundation to understand and grow into the role, demonstrating potential for growth, *"when you were on the other side, even me, as an employer, I expected that you have the foundation for it. And so that you can understand and grow into the role, and that you have potential."*

Another factor to consider is that candidates, particularly those at seniority levels, recognize that requirements can be inaccurate due to a lack of technical knowledge and specificities of the position. As Participant 11 pointed out, *"I literally found out that the companies write things that they need to and sometimes the hiring managers don't even know what they wrote*

there, what they asked for." This highlights the potential discrepancy between what is stated in job postings and the actual expectations of the hiring managers.

One factor that contributes to the confidence level of pursuing a job without meeting all the requirements is experience. The majority of participants, regardless of gender, expressed that their past experience and self-awareness enable them to feel confident when applying for jobs. As Participant 5 stated, *"My work, and I really know what I bring to the table, and how competent I am when I switch jobs."* This highlights how previous experience and a strong understanding of one's skills and abilities can instil confidence in candidates, even if they don't meet every requirement of a job.

However, participants are also aware of the presence of skill assessment and suspicion biases in the decision-making process. As Participant 6 highlighted, *"I would always understand that the one who is a decision maker, is a person, meaning that any decision that one makes is personal and very subjective, meaning that even if I think that I have met or didn't meet certain criteria, the other party may think differently. Even though I have proof of that"*.

Considering the value-driven nature of the younger generation, participants indicated that they apply for a company based on company culture, *"vibe from the company, like the vibe that you're getting from social media"* (Participant 2) and matching objectives *"I know in which direction I want to do and what I don't want to do. It's not like I will never do it, but I will tell you when I do this project, I'm good at this and this and this is what I want to learn"* (Participant 5). This aligns with their desire to work in environments that align with their personal beliefs and principles.

However, even if candidates manage to overcome their insecurities regarding matching all the requirements, they still encounter various types of hiring biases, including both gender-specific and non-gender-specific biases. As Participant 11 stated, *"I believe there are these biases which are there for males and for females. In general, people like themselves. So, if they see a beautiful female, they can be intimidated. If they see a beautiful male, they can be intimidated. If they see a smart person, and they are not confident enough to hire somebody smarter than they are."*

Regarding gender-specific biases, some of participant mentioned boys-club, as a factor influencing female not to be hired, *"because most CEOs of the companies are old men. That's why sometimes they don't see why they should be gender diverse in words, upper management, and so on. And sometimes they are very pretty young people also and they form some boy clubs"* (Participant 1). These biases can influence the decision-making process and potentially affect the fair evaluation of candidates' qualifications and abilities.

Nevertheless, participants consistently emphasized that the specificity of the work, particularly the occupation, plays a significant role in mitigating biases. For example, when it comes to developers, no biases in hiring were observed, as highlighted by Participant 7: *"In web development, I don't see any differences. I didn't hear anything from anyone. I came*

from a company that is open to everyone, so there is no difference at all. We respect each other, we like to share knowledge, and there is no gender that would make a difference." This observation suggests that certain occupations, such as web development, may exhibit a more inclusive and unbiased hiring environment where gender-based biases are less prevalent.

4.4   Factors Contributing to Confidence during Negotiation

Apart from the challenges posed by hiring and skill assessment biases, participants also emphasized the significant role that negotiation skills play in achieving fair pay rates. They highlighted that having strong negotiation skills is crucial in advocating for oneself and ensuring that compensation aligns with one's qualifications and the value one brings to the company. Participants highlighted several factors that contribute to their comfort and confidence in negotiating pay in technical and non-technical positions within the tech industry.

Firstly, having a measurable impact and tangible proof of their contributions to the company was mentioned as a key aspect. Participant 1 stated, *"So, you have to actually have some proof that the way you were communicating was also bringing customers for the employers."*

Secondly, participants emphasized the importance of a supportive environment during the negotiation process. Participant 2 expressed that having someone they trust, such as a friendly manager, can make the negotiation experience less daunting: *"I don't feel comfortable at it because it's always a scary thing to initiate this talk with someone, but it helps if you have someone you trust, because in my previous experience, I know that we were almost like friends with the manager."*

Lastly, participants mentioned the significance of communicating a commitment to continuous growth to their managers. Participant 3 highlighted their experience and expressed enthusiasm for learning new things: *"I have quite a lot of experience, so I guess that's another big plus. I am a very keen learner, so I always want to learn new stuff, which is also what I would say plus."*

4.5   Salary and Promotion Negotiations Strategies

The theme explores effective strategies for salary and promotion negotiations, including networking, patience, performance-based rewards, acknowledging personality differences, counter offers, addressing self-promotion gaps, respecting individual goals, embracing ambition, fostering adaptability, and addressing parental leave issues. It emphasizes the importance of strategic approaches and fair practices in achieving desired career advancements.

The interview process revealed various approaches undertaken by participants in salary and promotion negotiations, which can be categorized as gender-specific and non-gender-specific strategies. Among the gender-specific approaches discussed were strategic patience and project acquisition, particularly relevant for science-related positions. Participant 5 mentioned that for females, it is often important to secure a job or position first and accept the initial offered salary, with the intention to negotiate later based on their accomplishments and performance: *"I always ask for something mediocre, a salary and everything, but I know then in three months I will be where I want to be."*

Another situation highlighted in science-related jobs is that even after securing a position, it doesn't guarantee access to desirable projects. As females are often in the minority in faculties such as Mathematics and Computer Science, they need to be prepared to negotiate and leverage their networks to secure positions and opportunities. Participant 4 shared their experience of actively networking and negotiating for an assistant professor position: *"When I met the requirements to become an assistant professor, I just tried to talk to everyone that could help me get into this position, so I tried to negotiate this position, which is also not easy to get. You cannot always get this, even if you meet the requirements, there is a limited number of courses and a limited number of positions for professors."*

The two most prominent non-gender-specific tactics in salary and promotion negotiations are performance-based rewards and counteroffers. Participants consistently highlighted the significance of exceptional performance and the value they bring to their companies as key factors in their negotiations. Recognition from managers based on their performance without the need for explicit negotiations was also mentioned. Participant 9 noted, *"I was quite lucky because I really wasn't in a position to negotiate. The salary was just going up. So, one of the reasons is probably also due to the fact that I was really one of the top performers."* Similarly, Participant 10 mentioned, *"We have a performance review every 6 months, and at each performance review, you just try to give them the reasons why you want to be promoted for the work you do."* These tactics are particularly relevant for companies that have implemented salary ranges, which provide employees and employers with a framework to navigate salary and promotion discussions. Participant 10 suggested, *"What you want to do is either have some broad understanding of the brackets, the salary brackets that are at least in your company, and through that, what kind of value you bring."*

However, in cases where a company does not have a defined salary range, employees are often compelled to initiate negotiations by presenting counteroffers. Participant 8 explained, *"Profitability is important for companies, and they try not to increase their expenses. Therefore, I always go to such negotiations with an offer from another company, or better yet, a competitor, and then they are already open to negotiations."* By bringing alternative offers to the table, employees can initiate discussions and potentially secure favorable salary or promotion outcomes.

These tactics are often complemented by strategic negotiations, which involve conducting thorough market research. Participants emphasized the importance of staying updated with market trends, researching the industry and specific companies, and conducting self-assessments before entering negotiations. Participant 11 provided an example, stating, *"I do the BATNA (best alternatives and negotiate the agreement). I always do that assessment beforehand, and when I come there, I know what kind of position I'm applying for, so I know the range where it should be, and it's not personal."* This demonstrates the participant's proactive approach in gathering information and assessing their position in relation to market standards. By understanding the market and having a clear range in mind, negotiations can be approached objectively and with a focus on reaching mutually beneficial agreements.

Some participants also expressed the opinion that the success of negotiations depends highly on ambition, proactiveness, adaptability, and a growth mindset. They emphasized that employees should be open to challenges and proactive in suggesting their candidacy for participation in projects or problem-solving tasks. Participant 8 serves as a vivid example of this approach, as he believes that ambition and proactiveness contributed to the promotions within his career path. Participant 8 stated, *"The secret is probably that I'm not afraid of difficulties and I like to learn new things. For example, I saw an interesting position that is higher than the one I currently occupy. I approached the manager and said, 'I want to go there, I think I can handle it.'"*

Furthermore, participants shared a common opinion that employees should increase the intersection between their interests and the company's objectives. They recognized that there is never a 100 percent fit between what an employee offers and what the company needs, and this intersection can sometimes be narrow. It is not solely about the monetary aspect but also about aligning personal goals with the company's objectives. Participant 11 emphasized, *"The point is, there is never a 100 percent fit between what you are offering and what the company needs, and this intersection sometimes is really narrow. And there, it's not just about the money. It's also about what you want to do in your life because the company is, of course, going to try to increase this intersection, which means you're going to need to learn new things. You're going to need to adjust the way you believe you are bringing value. If you don't adjust your belief in your knowledge, that intersection is going to stay small. So, you will never be able to ask for a raise."*

These insights highlight the importance of ambition, proactiveness, adaptability, and aligning personal and company interests in achieving success in negotiations and career growth. By being proactive, seizing opportunities, and continuously learning and adjusting, employees can expand their potential and enhance their negotiation outcomes.

Other factors that contribute to the outcome of negotiations include personality traits and the self-promotion gap. Personality traits can impact the ability to communicate one's value to the company and initiate negotiations. Participants noted that introverted individuals may experience difficulties in expressing their worth or may hesitate to initiate negotiations. As

Participant 7 mentioned, *"Maybe personality is a bigger issue here with negotiation because I'm more like an introvert and I easily back off, so yeah. I'm not sure gender should not be an issue here, more personality."* This suggests that personality traits, rather than gender, can play a significant role in negotiation dynamics. However, some of female participants acknowledged that men tend to be more confident in negotiations. Participant 3 expressed this sentiment, stating, *"I feel like men are more confident, and they just try to present their work as pretty as possible."* This observation highlights a gender disparity in negotiation confidence.

Additionally, participants noted that men often have an advantage in negotiations as they tend to be more proactive in asking for raises when taking on additional work or responsibilities. Participant 12 explained, *"The difference between men and women is when you get a new job and usually, they'll tell you: 'OK, we want to give you more responsibility. Let's see how this goes and so forth.' A man will instantly ask: 'OK, how does that influence my benefits?' And we don't, we take on too many things just to prove that we are worthy and think that then they will see and say: OK. We have to increase her salary now."*

Fear of rejection was identified as another significant barrier preventing women from asking for raises. Participant 4 highlighted this fear, stating, *"I think they don't like to ask questions like this, or they are not prepared for rejection."* This fear can hinder women from initiating negotiations and advocating for higher salaries or promotions.

On the other hand, the self-promotion gap was specifically highlighted by female participants. They expressed the belief that compared to their male counterparts, females may struggle with self-promotion and effectively communicating the value they bring to secure higher pay or promotions. Participant 11 mentioned, *"I saw some discrepancy between men and women, and probably this is because you must upsell what you did during the performance review, and most of them are shy."* This observation suggests that there may be a gender-specific challenge for women in confidently and assertively promoting their achievements and capabilities during performance reviews or negotiations. Taken together, participants recognize that both personality traits, such as introversion, and the self-promotion gap, particularly among females, can influence the outcome of negotiations.

4.6   Difference in Pay

The theme explores the factors contributing to the difference in pay, highlighting various aspects that influence salary and career progression. Additionally, the theme addresses challenges arising from the lack of clear guidelines and the specific nature of work in influencing gender balance and opportunities. Visibility bias is also discussed, which may favor certain negotiation styles and affect career advancements.

To gather insights on differences in pay among individuals in similar positions with similar experiences, participants were asked to share their opinions and experiences. Interestingly,

a majority of the participants involved in development expressed the belief that there is no pay discrepancy between employees, including gender-based differences. Participant 6, for example, stated, *"I believe that it's almost the same, close to no difference when we are talking about developers in the tech industry."*

According to female participant insights, the presence of a "boys' club" culture was identified as a negative factor contributing to pay disparities between genders. Participants expressed the belief that women's contributions are undervalued, and factors such as maternity leaves and caregiving responsibilities are considered burdensome and used as justifications for lower pay. Participant 5 stated, *"They don't see the value. Why should they deal with the family absences and everything that is still heavily burdened on women?"*

Additionally, the lack of transparency in pay was mentioned by almost all participants, regardless of the gender. They highlighted that they have no knowledge of their team members' pay checks due to company policies that restrict discussion of salaries. Participant 2 mentioned, *"We don't really talk about it, at least in my experience."* This lack of transparency hinders the ability to assess pay equality and understand potential disparities.

Participants who work in companies with salary ranges expressed the belief that employees are generally paid within a range, with small deviations based on differences in skills or experience. Participant 8 shared their experience, stating, *"I never asked anyone for a salary, and when I was in a position where I discussed with the director what salary to give to an employee, then we had a salary range, and we started from it."*

However, participants emphasized that transparency in pay has a positive influence not only on pay equality but also on the overall company structure. They highlighted that open and transparent structures empower employees to challenge and improve them. Participant 9 stated, *"If you have structures that are open, that are transparent, that everyone can see, that everyone can challenge and improve them, then basically everyone is empowered. If you see that something is not working well within the framework, you can challenge it, and employees can improve it."*

Moreover, social dynamics, including networking and visibility within the company, were identified as factors that contribute to pay disparities. Participants expressed the belief that developing connections and befriending decision-makers in the company can positively impact career progression. Conversely, individuals who are shy, not strong negotiators, or fail to effectively communicate their work to their team members may experience pay disparities. Participant 7 noted, *"Maybe friendship in the company. Connections between people. Maybe some people have the same experience, and they do the same amount of work, but they might not be able to connect with other people in a way that other colleagues do, and they contribute more to the company, but not on paper."* This suggests that the ability to form relationships and establish connections within the workplace can influence opportunities for advancement and, subsequently, pay discrepancies.

Additionally, some participants highlighted the tendency for companies to push back on salaries. Participant 9 expressed, *"So if someone is quite shy and quiet on the negotiation, why pay more if you don't need to? So, you're going to save more money. The company will be better off. There will be more money for the people who are louder, so unfortunately, louder people get more money."* This observation suggests that louder and more assertive individuals may have an advantage in negotiating higher salaries.

Participant 8 further supported the notion, stating, *"I think it's because people don't do market research, the manager tells them that this is an average salary, and they believe it. And perhaps this is the average salary for the country, and not for its industry or specialization. It also happens to people who have been sitting in the same position for 5 years and are not interested in the market, they do not know their current value in the market."* This indicates that individuals who fail to conduct market research and stay informed about industry salary trends may unknowingly accept lower salaries.

One participant highlighted that working for a single company for a long period of time can slow down salary increases and promotions. They expressed the view that job-hopping can contribute not only to higher salaries in each company but also to gaining broad experience across industries and shaping one's skills. Participant 12 stated, *"That's one of the greatest factors that do impact whether people with the same qualifications in the same positions have drastically different compensations, namely those who stay with the company longer and try to develop and increase their salary over the years generally get less or experience slower progress than someone who just joined the company."* This perspective suggests that staying with one company for an extended period of time may not always lead to significant salary growth or career advancement. Instead, switching jobs and exploring opportunities in different organizations can offer higher salaries and the chance to acquire diverse experiences and skills.

4.7   Gender Balance in Senior Level

The theme explores the gender balance in senior-level positions and the various factors influencing women's representation in leadership roles. The theme examines the complex dynamics shaping gender balance in senior-level positions and the efforts to overcome challenges and biases.

When it comes to gender balance in senior-level positions, all participants agreed that there is a lack of balance in the tech industry. However, they also noted that compared to previous years, there has been some improvement. Participant 2 mentioned, *"I would say it's not equal because I mean this is the thing that I can really see everywhere. Even if you have some women in higher positions, I think you can see these doubts from the others. Is she, like, capable of?"*

Female participants highlighted competence bias as one of the reasons for the gender imbalance. Participant 12 stated, *"It's about how you're selling yourself. You're selling yourself to the board. You're selling yourself to other C-level managers, and we're not the best in self-marketing"*. They also mentioned the importance of trust in reaching C-level positions and acknowledged the challenges faced by women in establishing trust within a male-dominated environment. Participant 6 explained, *"Interestingly, women may find it easier to gain trust and secure those positions, but they usually need to establish mutual trust within an already existing male-dominated environment, which can be more challenging. However, it's not impossible"*.

Male participants shared the opinion that both genders are given equal opportunities to achieve senior positions. Participant 11 stated, *"I believe that if a female wants to have a senior position in IT, and if they're dedicated, they will achieve it. If they are capable, they will succeed like men. However, they need to invest the same amount of time, talent, and negotiation skills"*. They also mentioned that self-selection plays a significant role in career progression, *"There is still some sort of self-selection. In order to be the first, you have to fight. You can't say you want to win but don't want to fight"*.

Regarding the types of senior positions occupied by females, Participant 12 noted that the majority of C-level positions in the tech industry are not necessarily tech positions but rather people management roles. They mentioned HR, finance, and marketing as examples: *"Do you know what it's called now? People management, not HR anymore. So, they are in HR or Finance CFO or CMO marketing, so, it's such, supporting roles that are female most of the time."* Participant 10 acknowledged that females are often seen as good people managers and highlighted the ease of communication with them, stating, *"It's funny because when talking to an engineer, you must be in a very specific way and it's not like that with females, you have a more relaxed experience. They have the traits to be good managers or leaders"*.

Both genders mentioned that some females deliberately refuse career advancement due to family priorities. Participant 4 explained, *"The higher the position requires your time and your everything you know. So usually, women are still very much caring for their families and it's very hard to be apart for more time than the time they already spend in current positions, and they just take the easier path or some path that doesn't require so much time away from their family"*.

To elaborate on the male dominance in the tech industry and the concept of a "boys-club," participants were asked for their opinions on the notion that one gender is inherently superior or more effective than the other. All participants expressed the belief that this notion is a myth and that there is no difference in intellectual abilities between females and males. Participant 7 stated, *"There is a bigger percentage of males in the technology world than females, but if we compare two individuals, there would be no difference. They would have certain qualities that would be different because female and male people think a little bit differently. If we compare two individuals, there is no difference."*

The investigation into gender imbalance in the tech industry revealed several contributing factors. Participants highlighted the lack of females in tech-oriented faculties, such as computer science, which creates a gender disparity from the early stages of education. Participant 9 shared their experience, stating, *"In the Faculty of Education, which meant that there are a lot of potential teachers, which meant that also my class was really more or less dominated by women. There were just a bunch of us, while of course, in the computer science faculty, the situation was completely different, usually more or fewer men go in this direction."*

Occupational segregation was also identified as a factor stemming from societal norms and expectations. Participant 5 mentioned the challenges faced by women in pursuing tech-related careers due to societal perceptions, stating, *"This is so hard, how will you? How will it be, how can you work with computers now? This is so for the men."*

Furthermore, participants acknowledged that the composition of the tech industry is influenced by stakeholders such as clients. Participant 6 mentioned, *"It's primarily masculine and that's why I also see here that we do have maybe 40 to 60 percent females. However, we obviously can say that my male colleagues are in the majority. It really all depends on the customer. From my experience, who is the customer, because the customer dictates what kind of knowledge we should have? And in the sense of gaming, for some reason, men are more into it."*

4.8   Prolonged Absence and Maternity Leave

The theme focuses on the impact of prolonged absence and maternity leave on gender dynamics in the workplace. It also explores the complexities and implications of prolonged absence and maternity leave on gender equality in the workplace.

Specifically, participants engaged in a comprehensive discussion regarding the influence of prolonged absence, particularly due to maternity leave, on salary and promotion opportunities. Gender discrimination emerged as a subtheme within this context, with participants sharing firsthand examples. Participant 3 recounted a disturbing instance of gender-based discrimination, where a female colleague's promotion request was questioned due to the expectation of maternity leave in the future: *"I had a colleague in one of my previous jobs and she was a woman and she just recently got married and she was at the age where she could have a kid, you know, and she was like a promoted and she asked for more money, it was not like 20 thousand, it was like few thousand, you know, it wasn't much. And her manager said to her: "Why should I give you more money when you got married and you will end up going on maternity leave in like 6 months or a year?"*

However, unique circumstances and contributions to work were recognized during absences. In one case Participant 3 shared an encouraging example of a pregnant employee being promoted during maternity leave, the participant assumed that this decision was influenced

by returning to work relatively soon after childbirth, which is not usual for their country: *"I also have another friend who was promoted even though she was already pregnant, and they knew it. But she went back to her job after like six months after the birth, which is not usual."*

Another Participant 6 shared the story of colleague, who was promoted during long sick leave. Despite the absence, the colleague's significant contributions to the company's project were recognized, leading to a well-deserved promotion: *"Our colleague who still used to work on my project, got diagnosed with cancer and we knew that she won't be with us for at least a year. However, thanks to her contribution to the product and everything that she did. By that time, while on sick leave, she got promoted."*

The pervasive presence of gender bias and biased judgments came to light, with participants acknowledging the challenges faced by women in balancing work and family responsibilities. An example was given by Participant 5, where different attitudes were observed when men and women requested time off for family reasons, perpetuating a harmful double standard: *"If you finish your work at 4:00 because bigger companies do that, then you have an e-mail: "I'm not available from 4:00 to 6:00 in the morning because of family." and if a man does it: "I'm not available for it's time for my family." They are like: "Oh my God, you are such a good father. You want to take care of your family. But it is not the same for women. They will say: "She's soft, she prioritizes her family and not business", you know, and this is the problem."*

Participants also acknowledged the disadvantages women face in restarting their careers after maternity leave compared to their male counterparts, indicating the need for more equitable support systems. Participant 12 stated: *"I had to go into labor, but still, I lost time. And when I lost time, they had to reassign my roles. And then when I came back, I had to start all over."*

Participants in the discussion addressed the challenges of restarting a career after maternity leave. They highlighted that smaller companies, particularly start-ups, are more vulnerable to the impact of maternity leaves due to the lack of available workforce. Participant 6 explained, *"I know that is the fact the criteria in smaller IT companies for sure more, the smaller the company higher the risk, because they don't have many people to step in once. However, the greater the company the factors are negligible. Because the greater the company they are investing in the future in that sense."* Participant 3 raised a valid point regarding the challenges faced by companies when an employee takes prolonged absence, particularly during important projects. They emphasized that in such cases, it could be difficult for companies to hold the position for the absent employee, as there might be an immediate need for a replacement or understudy. The participant stated, *"Some of the companies will not be able to give you the old position back, you know, because they will need someone else right away."*

Participant 12 insight highlights how the nature of the work and the specific role an employee holds can influence the experience of taking maternity or paternity leave. Participant 12 mentioned, *"If developer females or males it doesn't influence. I mean if men could choose to go on paternity leave when you go from one project, you come back and if the same project is still open, you come back as the developer to the same project or another project, but they need a developer with your skill set for that."* This insight suggests that in certain positions, such as developers, there may be no drawbacks to going on maternity or paternity leave. If a developer leaves for leave and the same project is still ongoing upon their return, they can easily resume their role without any hindrance.

4.9 Parental Leave Laws

The theme revolves around parental leave laws and their impact on various aspects of the workplace. It highlights the significance of work-life balance and the need for policies and regulations that support employees in managing their work responsibilities alongside personal and family life. Additionally, the theme explores how companies develop workarounds to address challenges associated with maternity leave or employee absences effectively, seeking alternative arrangements or strategies to maintain smooth operations.

The discussion touched upon policies and regulations influencing career advancement and promotions. Participants shared insights into alternative arrangements and workarounds used by companies to navigate challenges associated with maternity leave or employee absences. For instance, Participant 2 stated: *"I know a lot of people who work not full-time, they work through s.p. in Slovenia. A lot of women don't want to work on a s.p. because they know that when they go on maternity leave, they will need to pay for themselves such amount, but if they're like employed full-time, it's a bit easier because they get this money from the company. Because some companies I know, don't want maybe to hire someone who will go on maternity leave soon."*

The importance of parental leave laws and work-life balance policies for fostering a healthy work environment and supporting families was also recognized. Participant 1 highlighted the positive impact of such policies on gender equality and overall family well-being: *"This is also great from the family standpoint of view, otherwise if you're there just with the mother for one year and the father is usually working long hours, it is not beneficial for families, and I believe that this impacts gender inequality and also other aspects of family life positively."* The traditional bias against paternity leave still persists, particularly among Gen X individuals, leading to limited utilization of this opportunity. Many participants, including Gen X individuals, were not even aware of the option for paternity leave. One participant expressed this sentiment, stating, *"That's a possibility, but I have never met anyone that would do it that way. 6/6 it. It's usually a woman that stays at home"* (Participant 7).

Furthermore, the importance of evaluating candidates based on merit and qualifications, rather than solely considering gender for diversity quotas, was emphasized by Participant 3:

"But here's the thing, you've already conducted, like, 20 interviews over 2 months or something, and none of the women candidates seem to be a good fit, in that case, I don't see why you should hire a female just for the sake of meeting regulations."

Also, proper monitoring and evaluation of gender equality initiatives were highlighted by Participant 4 as necessary to ensure effectiveness and address potential discrepancies: *"I think this is a very important step that universities have started to realize that they will have to change something, I mean they should not just implement, but monitor or activate someone to do this gender equality plan measures that they have in mind. So, I think that this is a very good thing, but still, we are still at the beginning of this process. Some universities don't have a gender equality plan yet."*

4.10   Work Experience and Hours

The theme centers on the significance of work experience and hours in the workplace, emphasizing the importance of recognizing individual skills, competencies, and performance rather than solely relying on traditional criteria such as work experience in years or hours worked. It also highlights the value of delivering high-quality work and outcomes, shifting the focus from quantity to the quality of work produced. Additionally, the theme addresses potential biases that may arise in hiring processes, specifically the "Culture Fit Bias," which can affect gender diversity by favoring candidates who conform to a company's culture.

Participants discussed topics related influence of work hour and experience on pay. Participant 1 emphasized the need for pay to be based on skill and knowledge rather than just work experience or hours worked: *"The criteria for how much you should be paid, not by the work experience all the long hours you know, maybe I need 3 hours to do something and somebody else will need 5 hours to do something, so you know actually you should pay me more."*

Also, Participant 2 highlighted the importance of considering productivity and output when determining pay, rather than solely focusing on the number of hours worked: *"it depends also on the output they give because they of course can work more, but they don't do much more."*

Additionally, Participant 10 noted that company culture can impact hiring decisions, as some companies may expect employees to work longer hours and view candidates who express reservations about this as less suitable for the organization: *"I know a couple of companies in Slovenia that do this, and I don't support it, but I think that it affects the hiring processes. If one person is not willing to do this and states it during the interview, the company perceives such a candidate as an issue, meaning she/he will not adapt to our culture."*

4.11   Leadership Challenges

The theme of leadership revolves around creating a supportive and equitable work environment. It addresses issues like pay-equity awareness, acknowledging the challenges of managing work and childcare responsibilities, accommodating prolonged absences, and emphasizing the importance of empathy and support from managers. These elements are vital in fostering a compassionate and understanding leadership culture that values employees' well-being and contributions.

Some participants that hold managerial positions shared their experience and thoughts on facing significant struggles in coping with inequality while fulfilling their responsibility of profit generation and operation continuity. The discussions revealed various themes related to these challenges. One crucial aspect is pay-equity awareness, where managers grapple with identifying and addressing discrepancies in pay to ensure equal compensation for individuals in similar positions. Participant 9 stated: *"I had a situation just recently where two women that were actually hired in a similar position were differently paid. So, it was really a hard discussion. Why is someone being paid more so for more or less almost doing the same job? And yeah, what in the end, we didn't have the framework for that position, we started working on building the framework. We understand for what we are paying and why are we paying and what are the differences?"* This issue raises tough questions about why some employees receive higher pay for almost the same job, necessitating discussions and the development of appropriate frameworks.

Another prominent challenge of balancing work responsibilities with childcare duties. Managers acknowledge the difficulties faced by both male and female employees who are parents and need to manage childcare responsibilities alongside their professional roles: *"I also have, people who are an engineer, or managers position and they just recently became parents, and they still need to sometimes take parental leave or take care of the childcare. The childcare part is actually you need to take care of the kids while in the other case, you are actually away from your work. You need to balance this well, so I'm not saying that you shouldn't do that. I'm saying it is actually you as a manager, need to deal with these challenges"* (Participant 9). Addressing childcare concerns while maintaining productivity requires a delicate balance and demands empathy and support from managers.

Prolonged absences, particularly due to parental leave, also present hurdles for managers. Finding strategies to accommodate these absences while retaining the individual's value and contribution to the company is a complex task. Some solutions include hiring temporary staff or adjusting the scope of responsibilities to ensure the person remains an asset to the company: *"Sometimes you need to actually hire another person to actually leverage this. Sometimes you need to build the leverage on, I don't know, by smalling the scope on which the person can contribute. At least they're still valuable assets to the company and can contribute. The kids won't be always quite young, so at one point they will have more time and they will definitely value how the company approached this"* (Participant 9).

The importance of managerial empathy and support towards employees' personal circumstances, such as family emergencies or childcare responsibilities, is emphasized as well by Participant 11: *"What can you do as a manager? Can you organize a team? Are people motivated? Do they have a clear vision? Do they know what they need to work on? How many levels can you be a good manager ? It depends on the industry, but there is added value. Many people want to be bosses. They want to have the weight of the boss. But are you willing to be strong and supportive of a person whose kids just got sick? Can you do that? What do you do if you have four people on your team and you've lost 25 percent of your workforce? Are you going to kick them out?"* This aspect highlights the multifaceted nature of a manager's role, where they must balance being a strong leader with being supportive during challenging times.

4.12   Exploring the Gender Pay Gap: Tracing Causes and Conceptual Connections

The conceptual map demonstrates a complex causation chain for workplace gender inequality. This case involves the difficult "Gender Pay Gap," uneven remuneration between genders. This imbalance is compounded by the "Pay Gap," which highlights compensation gaps. Insufficient transparency in pay determination and an inconsistent structure for compensation ranges and performance reviews widen the discrepancy.

Professional "Job Hopping" depends on transparency, compensation structure, and enticing counter offers. "Social Dynamics," or interpersonal interactions, affect workplace "Visibility." Professional networking improves career mobility, income growth, promotion, and senior management visibility.

New job acquisition, or "Project Acquisition," demands "Adaptability" a "Growth Mindset," "Self-Promotion" and self-confidence. The above considerations strongly impact project acquisition. "Hiring Insights" from the recruitment process and "Biases" strongly influence "Deciding Upon Candidate" decisions and job applications.

The congruence of "Objectives" between individuals and firms affects "Self-Selection" for job tasks, making "Company Culture" vital. The second phenomena are driven by "Occupational Segregation," the disproportionate concentration of females in specific occupations, "Hybrid Jobs," which integrate different, mostly non-technical abilities, and "Competence Bias," which influences skills perception.

Cultural and societal variables strongly impact career choices. The aforesaid demands effect family decision-making, social media, educator and key figure counselling, and policy and regulation understanding.

"Parental Leave Laws" and "Transparency Regulations" aim to minimize inequality; however, ignorance can limit their effectiveness. The conceptual map, as shown on Figure

1, depicts how one element impacts and is influenced by others, contributing to employment market gender inequality.

Figure 1: Understanding the Gender Pay Gap: Mapping Causes and Conceptual Relationships
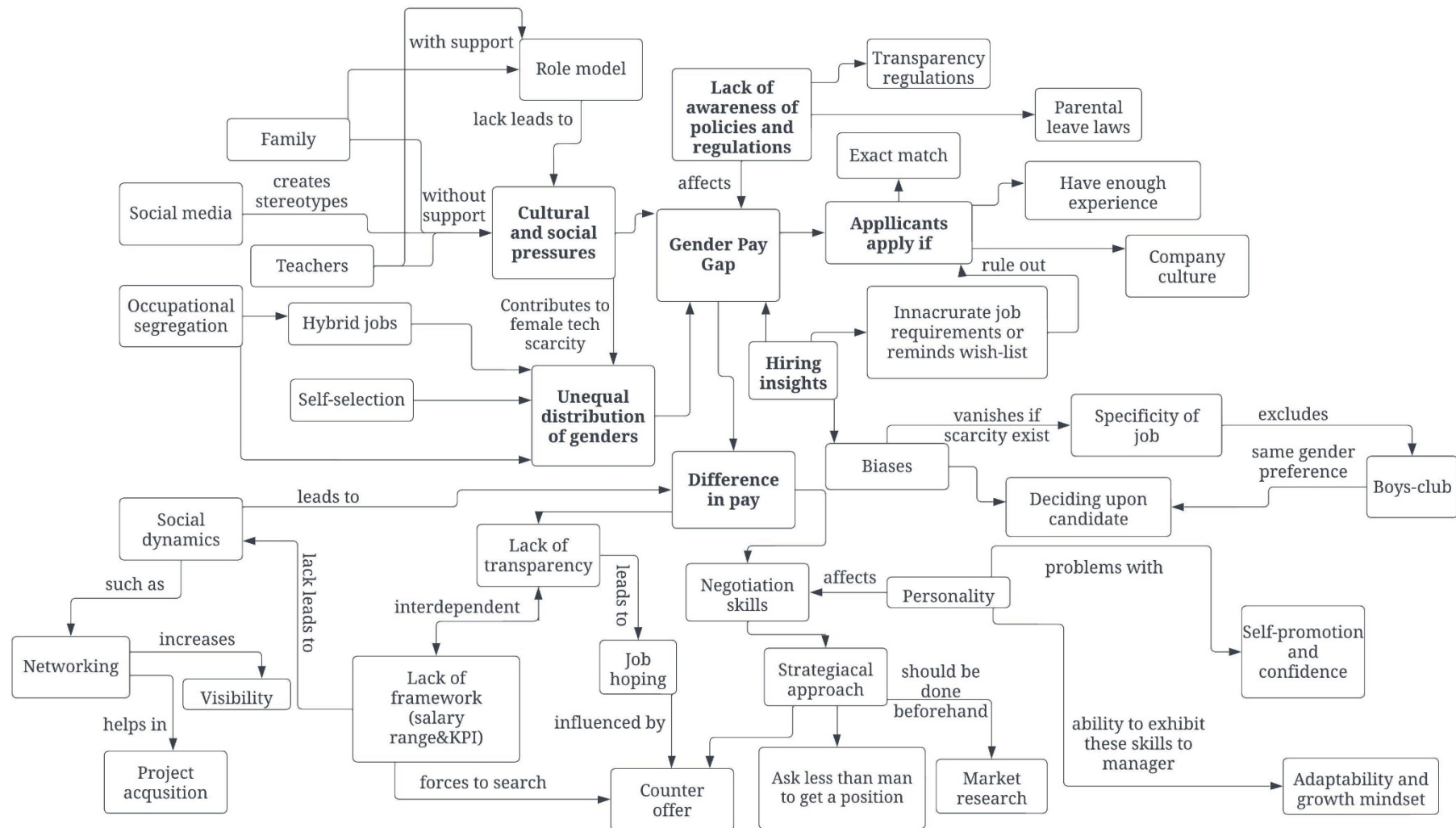
Source: Own work.

5   DISCUSSIONS

In the discussion part of the research covers the findings from the study are analyzed and interpreted in the context of the research objectives and existing literature. The discussion aims to provide a deeper understanding of the results and draw meaningful conclusions from the data gathered.

5.1   Summary of Key Findings

This section presents the findings from the study focusing on unravelling the gender pay gap in the tech industry. The research delves into the underlying mechanisms that drive the disparity in pay between men and women. It explores the influence of cultural and social pressures on career choices, particularly concerning gender-specific biases. Additionally, the study investigates the impact of role models and societal expectations on career decisions and how these factors contribute to the gender pay gap in the tech industry. Understanding these mechanisms is crucial for developing strategies to address the gender pay gap and promote more equitable career opportunities for all individuals in the tech sector.

5.1.1   Unravelling the Gender Pay Gap in Tech: Mechanisms and Perceptions

The findings of this section shed light on the underlying mechanisms driving the gender pay gap in the tech industry. The study delved into the influence of cultural and social pressures on career choices in the tech industry, particularly concerning gender-specific biases. Participants recognized traditional biases in society that shape perceptions of suitable career paths for men and women. These biases start early in childhood and persist into adulthood, affecting career choices throughout individuals' lives. Girls are often encouraged to pursue roles associated with caring and education, while boys are steered towards STEM-related fields.

The societal pressure to make safe career choices based on traditional gender roles and expectations was evident among the participants. Female participants expressed experiencing doubts and scepticism when considering non-traditional career paths like engineering. This societal pressure may deter women from pursuing careers in certain tech-related fields.

The study also highlighted the role of role models, including family members and teachers, in inspiring interest in technology-related careers. The research proved Barron's study (2004) that family members, especially parents, were instrumental in igniting curiosity and fascination with technology for many participants. However, contrary to PwC UK (2017) the positive influence of teachers and peers in motivating students to consider tech careers was primarily mentioned by male participants. This disparity suggests potential differences

in exposure to role models, which may impact career choices between genders in the tech industry.

In conclusion, the study reveals that cultural and social pressures significantly influence career choices in the tech industry, particularly regarding gender-specific biases. The early formation of gender stereotypes and societal expectations can impact career decisions throughout individuals' lives. The presence of role models, particularly family members and teachers, also plays a crucial role in inspiring interest in technology-related fields. Understanding and addressing these underlying mechanisms can be essential in narrowing the gender pay gap in the tech industry and promoting more diverse and equitable career opportunities for all.

5.1.2 Navigating the Gender Pay Gap in Tech: Career Insights and Negotiation Strategies

This section explores the findings related to second research question, which delves into the differences in career trajectories and promotion patterns between men and women in the tech industry. Additionally, examines how these variations contribute to the gender pay gap experienced in the sector.

The study revealed various hiring biases, including both gender-specific and non-gender-specific biases. Specific occupations, like web development, were found to exhibit a more inclusive and unbiased hiring environment. Negotiation skills were considered crucial in achieving fair pay rates, and participants highlighted the significance of measurable impact and continuous growth in negotiating salaries.

Gender-specific negotiation approaches included strategic patience and project acquisition, especially in science-related positions where females may need to secure a job first and negotiate later based on accomplishments. Non-gender-specific salary and promotion negotiation tactics emphasize performance-based rewards in companies with implemented salary ranges and counteroffers, particularly relevant in companies without implemented salary ranges.

In companies without defined salary ranges, employees are encouraged to initiate negotiations by presenting counteroffers, especially with the support of alternative offers from competitor companies. Strategic negotiations involve thorough market research and understanding the industry and specific companies' standards to approach negotiations objectively.

Success in negotiations and career growth is influenced by ambition, proactiveness, adaptability, and aligning personal goals with company objectives. Men often have an advantage in negotiations due to greater confidence and proactive behavior in asking for raises when taking on additional responsibilities. Fear of rejection and the self-promotion

gap can hinder women from initiating negotiations effectively. These provide evidence that women's lower negotiating skills, coupled with their reluctance to initiate negotiations, contribute to the gender pay gap in the tech industry. These differences in negotiation behavior have been studied across various disciplines, shedding light on the factors influencing this gap (Farrow, 2021).

Personality traits, such as introversion, can impact the ability to effectively negotiate and communicate one's values. Female participants mentioned the presence of a "boys' club" culture, undervaluation of women's contributions, and the burden of caregiving responsibilities as factors contributing to pay disparities. Lack of salary transparency and social dynamics, including networking and visibility within the company, also play a role in pay discrepancies.

Companies with salary ranges generally maintain fairness in pay, with minor deviations based on skills and experience. Transparent pay structures empower employees to challenge and improve them.

The study revealed various factors influencing career choices, hiring processes, and negotiation outcomes within the tech industry. Participants emphasized the importance of proactive behavior, self-promotion, market research, and aligning personal and company interests in achieving successful negotiations and career growth. Additionally, the study shed light on gender-specific challenges, such as the self-promotion gap and the impact of a "boys' club" culture on pay disparities. Addressing these issues and promoting transparency in pay structures can contribute to a more equitable and inclusive work environment within the tech industry.

The study also revealed several noteworthy findings related to career choices, salary negotiations, and gender disparities within the tech industry. Participants emphasized the advantages of job-hopping over long-term tenure in a single company, as it can lead to higher salaries and greater career advancement opportunities. Job-hopping was seen as a way to acquire diverse experiences and skills across different industries.

Regarding gender imbalance in senior-level positions, all participants agreed that there is still a lack of balance in the tech industry, although some improvement has been observed compared to previous years. Female participants highlighted the existence of competence bias, where women's contributions are undervalued, and they face challenges in self-marketing and gaining trust within male-dominated environments.

In contrast, male participants believed that both genders have equal opportunities to achieve senior positions, provided they are dedicated, capable, and invest the same amount of time and effort. They mentioned self-selection as a significant factor in career progression, emphasizing the need for dedication and perseverance to succeed.

Interestingly, the majority of C-level positions occupied by females in the tech industry are people management roles, such as HR, finance, and marketing. This observation highlights the need for a broader representation of women in technical positions and provides evidence that aligns with the dual-labor theory concerning hybrid jobs, which entail both technological and communication skills and are positioned as opportunities for women but suffer from undervaluation and contribute to task segregation (Glover & Guerrier, 2010).

The study shed light on the impact of prolonged absence on salary and promotion opportunities, particularly due to maternity leave. Gender discrimination and biased judgments were observed, where women faced challenges in balancing work and family responsibilities, which supports the "statistical discrimination" theory (Phelps,1972). However, some unique cases were noted, where pregnant employees were promoted during maternity leave or extended sick leave due to their significant contributions to projects.

Participants acknowledged the challenges women face when restarting their careers after maternity leave, especially in smaller companies where the available workforce is limited. The specific role an employee holds can also influence the impact of maternity or paternity leave, with certain positions, like developers, being more accommodating.

Addressing gender disparities and promoting transparency in pay structures emerged as essential steps toward creating a more equitable work environment within the tech industry. The study emphasized the importance of proactiveness, self-promotion, and aligning personal goals with company objectives in achieving successful salary negotiations and career growth. Furthermore, combating gender biases and promoting work-life balance is crucial to fostering a diverse and inclusive tech industry.

5.1.3   Closing the Gender Pay Gap in Tech: Effective Policies & Perceptions

This section presents the findings related to the third research question, which investigates the most effective policies and programs that companies in the tech industry can implement to mitigate the gender pay gap. Moreover, we explore how individuals within the industry perceive the effectiveness of these policies and programs in addressing the gender pay disparity.

The discussion further explored policies and regulations influencing career advancement and promotions within the tech industry. Participants mentioned alternative arrangements used by companies to navigate challenges associated with maternity leave or employee absences. Some companies preferred hiring full-time employees over those on self-employment contracts to avoid potential costs related to maternity leave.

Parental leave laws and work-life balance policies were recognized as crucial for supporting families and fostering a healthy work environment. However, the traditional bias against

paternity leave was still evident among Gen X individuals, leading to limited utilization of this opportunity.

The discussion also emphasized the importance of evaluating candidates based on merit and qualifications rather than solely considering gender for diversity quotas. Proper monitoring and evaluation of gender equality initiatives were seen as essential to ensure effectiveness and address potential discrepancies.

When determining pay, participants highlighted the need to consider skill, productivity, and output rather than solely relying on work experience or hours worked. Company culture and expectations around working hours could impact hiring decisions, potentially disadvantaging candidates who prioritize work-life balance.

Some participants in managerial positions shared their challenges in coping with inequality while managing profit generation and operational continuity. These challenges included pay-equity awareness, balancing work responsibilities with childcare duties, and finding strategies to accommodate prolonged absences due to parental leave while retaining the individual's value to the company.

Managerial empathy and support towards employees' personal circumstances, such as family emergencies or childcare responsibilities, were emphasized as crucial for maintaining a positive work environment and supporting employees during challenging times.

Overall, the study highlighted the importance of policy changes, empathy, and support from managers to address gender disparities and promote work-life balance within the tech industry. By implementing fair hiring practices, monitoring gender equality initiatives, and recognizing the value of employees' diverse experiences, the industry can move towards a more inclusive and supportive work environment.

5.2   Contributions to Gender Pay Gap Research

This section presents contribution to the gender pay gap research and addresses several key issues related to gender pay gap, work culture, and parental leave awareness, providing valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities for promoting gender equality in the tech industry.

5.2.1   Contributions to Gender Pay Gap Awareness

The study's findings on gender representation in the tech industry are particularly relevant as they reveal that the gender pay gap primarily stems from underrepresentation rather than pay disparities. When women are underrepresented in the tech industry, there are fewer female employees in higher-paying positions, such as senior management or technical leadership roles. As a result, the overall average salary for women in the industry is lower

than that of men. The shortage of females pursuing tech careers poses challenges for achieving a diverse and balanced workforce. By understanding this aspect, companies and policymakers can focus on initiatives to attract more women to tech roles and create a more inclusive environment.

Another crucial contribution of the study is highlighting the critical knowledge gap in parental leave laws and its impact on work-life balance for individuals with caregiving responsibilities. Lack of awareness about parental leave rights may lead to underutilization, particularly by women, which in turn reinforces traditional gender roles and can have long-term implications on women's career development and earnings.

Furthermore, the study's observation of the increasing acceptance of paternity leaves among the young generation is encouraging. This shift towards more equitable parenting responsibilities can help reduce the burden on women, allowing them to balance their family and professional lives more effectively.

5.2.2   Contributions to Shaping an Inclusive Work Environment

The study sheds light on the perception of gender equality in the tech industry among the young generation. Their view of the tech industry without gender superiority challenges biases and stereotypes that hinder women's advancement in tech. This attitude fosters a more inclusive and supportive work environment, paving the way for more equitable opportunities for women in the industry.

Moreover, the study highlights the evolving work culture, where long hours are no longer equated with hard work. Emphasizing work-life balance and employee well-being contributes to reducing the gender pay gap, as it allows individuals with caregiving responsibilities, often women, to manage their personal and professional lives more effectively.

The study's insights into the implementation of gender balance policies in educational institutions are critical. By carefully controlling the implementation of these policies, it is possible to avoid reinforcing gender stereotypes and encourage more women to pursue tech careers, ultimately contributing to a more balanced workforce and reducing the pay gap.

5.2.3   Contributions to Pay Transparency and Fairness

The study draws attention to the lack of transparency in pay policies in Slovenian companies, which is a concerning factor perpetuating gender pay gaps. Transparent policies, as suggested by the study, promote fairness and accountability, providing employees with a better understanding of their compensation and ensuring gender equality in pay.

The study also highlights the new generation's values-driven decision-making and their commitment to diversity and inclusion. Their preference for companies aligned with ethical values fosters a more equitable work environment and promotes gender equality.

Furthermore, the study reveals the new generation's dedication to social contribution and giving back to society, which includes volunteering and sharing tech knowledge. This altruistic approach empowers and supports women in the tech industry, fostering a community that promotes gender equality and professional growth.

5.2.4 Contributions to Purpose-Driven Careers and Gender Equality

The study emphasizes the shift from a money-driven to a purpose-driven mindset among the new generation. Seeking fulfilling careers that drive positive change and promote gender equality contributes to narrowing the gender pay gap and creating a more equitable future workforce.

In conclusion, as shown in Table 2 the study's comprehensive insights into the evolving perspectives of the new generation reveal a more inclusive, socially responsible, and gender-equal approach to work and career choices. Their dedication to gender equality, values-driven decision-making, and societal contributions has the potential to bring about transformative change in both the workplace and society. As these individuals enter the workforce and emerge as the leaders of tomorrow, their advocacy for gender equality and commitment to purpose-driven work can pave the way for a more equitable and diverse future.

Table 2: Summary of contributions

Contribution	Summary
Gender Pay Gap Awareness	− Gender pay gap in tech industry driven by underrepresentation of women rather than pay disparities. − Shortage of women in higher-paying positions leads to lower average salaries for women. − Initiatives needed to attract more women to tech roles and create an inclusive environment.
Shaping an Inclusive Work Environment	− Young generation challenges biases, fostering a more inclusive work environment. − Emphasis on work-life balance reduces gender pay gap for individuals with caregiving responsibilities.

To be continued

Contribution	Summary
	− Gender balance policies in educational institutions encourage women to pursue tech careers. − Transparent policies promote fairness and accountability, ensuring gender equality in pay. − Values-driven decision-making and commitment to diversity foster an equitable work environment.
Purpose-Driven Careers and Gender Equality	− Shift towards purpose-driven careers contributes to narrowing the gender pay gap. − Dedication to social contribution and support for women in tech industry promote gender equality. − Advocacy for gender equality in the workplace drives transformative change in society.

Source: Own work

5.3   Practical and Policy Implication

Based on the carried-out research, valuable insights from the participants, analysis, the initiatives have been categorized into eight distinct groups. These categories encapsulate the diverse efforts and challenges in advocating for gender diversity and inclusion within the tech industry. By organizing these initiatives into cohesive groups, we can better understand the multifaceted nature of promoting equal opportunities and fostering a more inclusive tech sector.

5.3.1   Advocating for Diversity and Inclusion in the Tech Industry

Promoting gender diversity in the tech industry starts with advocating for equal opportunities for all genders. Companies that recognize the importance of diversity create inclusive environments where diverse perspectives can thrive. One real-case example of this approach comes from Canada, where the government has introduced the "Gender and Diversity in Technology" initiative. This program encourages companies to adopt diversity and inclusion policies, promoting equal representation of women and underrepresented groups in tech-related roles. The initiative provides incentives and recognition for companies that meet diversity targets, encouraging them to implement transparent hiring practices that ensure fair representation of all genders.

Transparency in salaries and hiring practices is another critical aspect of advocating for diversity and inclusion. In Belgium, the government introduced legislation requiring

organizations to conduct gender pay gap analyses and publish the results. This measure encourages companies to assess and address any wage disparities, fostering an environment of fairness and accountability. Such transparency not only helps bridge the gender pay gap but also showcases a commitment to creating equitable workplaces that attract diverse talent.

A key factor in fostering gender diversity is having supportive managers who recognize the unique skills and contributions of female employees. In Finland, the "Leadership from Every Seat" initiative encourages companies to provide leadership development opportunities for employees at all levels, regardless of gender. This approach helps identify and nurture female talents, paving the way for increased representation in leadership roles.

Additionally, Germany has implemented the "Female Quota" policy, which mandates that larger companies have a minimum representation of women on their boards. This measure ensures that qualified women are considered for leadership positions, providing them with opportunities to influence company decisions and contribute to overall diversity and inclusion efforts.

To further promote diversity and inclusion, companies can consider implementing mentorship and sponsorship programs. Mentorship programs pair experienced employees with early-career professionals to provide guidance and support. In contrast, sponsorship programs entail the active support and endorsement of high-ranking executives in order to facilitate the professional progression of exceptionally skilled individuals. These initiatives can help women and underrepresented groups gain access to crucial networks and opportunities, fostering a culture of empowerment and growth within the tech industry.

5.3.2   Transparency in Pay Structures and Communication

Transparency and open communication are essential pillars in fostering an inclusive and thriving tech industry. The examples provided underscore the significance of transparency in different facets, including salaries, experiences, and challenges. Additionally, the need for creating a safe environment where individuals can freely express their needs and concerns is highlighted as a crucial element in promoting diversity and inclusion.

The lack of transparency in salary ranges at the market level, particularly in the tech industry in Slovenia, plays a crucial role in the transparency within companies. Without knowledge of the industry's salary standards, companies may struggle to set competitive salaries for positions, leading to potential pay disparities. In such cases, counter offers become essential not only for employees to negotiate higher salaries but also for companies to adjust their salary ranges to align with industry norms. Transparency in salary structures and compensation is vital in addressing pay disparities and promoting gender equality within the tech industry. One real-case example of this approach comes from Australia, where the Workplace Gender Equality Act requires companies with over 100 employees to report on

their gender pay gaps. This initiative not only encourages companies to identify and address wage discrepancies but also promotes a culture of fairness and equality.

Furthermore, enhancing transparency around experiences and challenges faced by underrepresented groups can shed light on systemic issues within the industry. In Sweden, the "Tech Equity Pledge" initiative encourages tech companies to share data on diversity and inclusion efforts, experiences of employees, and the steps taken to promote a more equitable workplace. By openly acknowledging challenges and sharing best practices, companies can collectively work towards building a more inclusive and supportive tech community.

Also fostering a safe and inclusive environment where individuals feel comfortable expressing their needs and concerns is vital to retaining diverse talent and nurturing creativity. One real-case example comes from the Netherlands, where "Diversity and Inclusion Workshops" are conducted to promote open discussions on workplace experiences and challenges faced by employees. These workshops provide a platform for employees to express their thoughts and perspectives, creating a supportive atmosphere that values diverse voices. Additionally, promoting a culture of psychological safety through anonymous feedback mechanisms can encourage honest and open communication. In Canada, "Feedback Boxes" in tech companies allow employees to share their concerns and suggestions anonymously, ensuring that everyone's voice is heard without fear of retribution. This approach fosters a culture of trust and openness, making it easier for underrepresented individuals to share their experiences and contribute to positive change.

To further enhance transparency and communication, companies can consider implementing diversity and inclusion training programs. Such programs help educate employees about the importance of fostering an inclusive environment and equip them with the tools to address biases and prejudices effectively. Countries like Germany have introduced "Diversity Training" in tech companies to raise awareness about unconscious biases and promote a more inclusive workplace culture.

5.3.3   Promoting Tech Careers and Education

Promoting tech careers and education is instrumental in cultivating a diverse and skilled tech workforce. The examples provided highlight the importance of encouraging individuals from diverse academic backgrounds to consider technology careers, as well as advocating for tech-related topics to be integrated into primary school education.

Encouraging individuals with backgrounds not only in mathematics but also social sciences to explore technology careers can bridge the gap between diverse fields and the tech industry. In the United States, the "Tech Transition Program" has been implemented in universities, offering specialized training and mentorship to students from non-technical backgrounds who wish to enter the tech sector. This initiative equips students with the necessary skills

and knowledge to transition smoothly into tech-related roles, thus widening the pool of diverse talents within the industry.

Moreover, in Brazil, some tech companies have launched awareness campaigns targeting students in liberal arts and social sciences fields. By showcasing the versatility and exciting opportunities in technology careers, these campaigns inspire students to consider pursuing tech as a viable and rewarding career path.

Advocating for tech-related topics in primary school education fosters early adoption of technology. Singapore's "Digital Literacy Programs" and Finland's "Coding for Kids" initiative exemplify such efforts. These programs equip young students with essential tech skills, nurturing digital fluency and confidence, which can lead to exploring tech careers later in life.

To further promote tech careers and education, fostering strong partnerships between the tech industry and academic institutions is crucial. Real-case examples from the Netherlands demonstrate the success of "Tech Internship Programs" where tech companies collaborate with universities to offer internships to students. These programs provide students with practical exposure to real-world tech projects, enriching their learning experience and connecting them with potential employers.

Additionally, countries like India have established "Innovation Hubs" that serve as collaborative spaces for tech companies and educational institutions. These hubs facilitate knowledge sharing, research collaboration, and skill development, creating a mutually beneficial ecosystem that encourages students to explore tech careers and stay up to date with industry advancements.

5.3.4   Addressing Misconceptions and Stereotypes

Addressing misconceptions and stereotypes is a critical step in creating a more inclusive and diverse tech industry. The examples provided shed light on the potential unintended consequences of movements that focus solely on "Women in IT" and highlight the importance of promoting understanding and awareness among tech leaders.

Expressing concerns that movements exclusively centered on "Women in IT" might inadvertently reinforce stereotypes and perpetuate inequality opens the door for rethinking approaches to gender diversity. In Sweden, the "Gender-Inclusive Tech Initiative" takes a broader approach by promoting gender diversity without singling out women. This initiative encourages an inclusive environment where diverse talents are celebrated and supported, regardless of gender. By shifting the narrative, this approach creates a more equitable playing field and fosters a sense of belonging for all individuals in the tech industry.

Similarly, in the United Kingdom, the "Tech for All" campaign emphasizes the importance of diversity and inclusion across all genders, backgrounds, and identities. By promoting a message of inclusivity rather than singling out specific gender groups, this campaign encourages a more welcoming and supportive tech community.

Promoting understanding and awareness among tech leaders through learning from experiences in other regions can be a transformative step in addressing misconceptions and breaking stereotypes. In the Netherlands, the "International Tech Exchanges" initiative facilitates knowledge sharing and collaboration between tech professionals from different countries. By engaging in cross-cultural interactions, tech leaders gain valuable insights into diverse perspectives and practices, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and globally aware tech ecosystem.

In Germany, some tech companies have implemented "Diversity Speaker Series" where industry leaders from diverse backgrounds share their experiences and challenges. This initiative not only raises awareness about the importance of inclusivity but also provides tangible examples of how diversity enriches tech teams and fosters innovation.

To further address misconceptions and stereotypes, promoting diverse leadership and mentorship programs can be highly impactful. Real-case examples from the United States demonstrate how "Diversity Mentorship Initiatives" pair tech professionals from underrepresented backgrounds with experienced mentors. This approach not only empowers individuals to overcome stereotypes but also helps break down barriers and fosters a supportive network for professional growth.

Furthermore, countries like Canada have introduced "Diverse Leadership Initiatives" in tech companies, which encourage leadership teams to actively seek diverse talent for top positions. By embracing diverse leadership, companies set an example of inclusive practices that can inspire the broader industry.

5.3.5 Supporting Diversity and Providing Opportunities

Supporting diversity and providing opportunities are crucial elements in creating a more inclusive and empowering tech industry. The examples presented advocate for companies to prioritize diversity and inclusion, facilitate the pursuit of individuals' interests and passions, and recognize the significance of competent managers and successful women role models.

Calling for companies to strive for diversity and inclusion is essential for creating a welcoming and diverse tech community. One real-case example comes from Norway, where the "Diversity and Inclusion Charter" has been widely adopted by tech companies. By signing this charter, companies commit to promoting diversity at all levels, fostering an inclusive workplace culture, and implementing policies that ensure equal opportunities for

all employees. This initiative drives companies to take concrete steps toward building diverse and equitable tech teams.

Recommending the selection of competent managers to foster a supportive environment is vital for nurturing diverse talent within tech companies. In Germany, the "Inclusive Leadership Training" initiative provides managers with training on inclusive leadership practices. This equips them with the skills to recognize and value diverse perspectives, facilitate open communication, and ensure fair and unbiased decision-making. Competent managers who embrace inclusive leadership contribute to an environment where all employees feel valued and empowered.

Additionally, in India, some tech companies have implemented "Diversity Scorecards" for evaluating managerial performance. These scorecards assess how managers actively support diversity and inclusion within their teams. By tying diversity efforts to managerial evaluations, companies reinforce the importance of fostering an inclusive work culture.

Having successful women role models in the tech industry is crucial for inspiring aspiring professionals. In Canada, the "Tech Women Ambassadors Program" appoints accomplished women in tech as mentors and ambassadors, serving as role models for young individuals and encouraging them to pursue tech careers. Likewise, Sweden's "Tech Role Model Series" features interviews and webinars with successful women in tech, celebrating their accomplishments and providing valuable insights to inspire and guide the next generation of diverse tech talent.

5.3.6   Encouraging Girls and Women in Tech

Encouraging girls and women to pursue careers in tech is crucial for achieving gender diversity and fostering innovation in the industry. Example 18 highlights the importance of external communities and educational institutions in creating a welcoming environment and offering opportunities for girls interested in tech.

Real-case examples from Sweden demonstrate the success of "Tech Girls Clubs" that have been established in collaboration with tech companies and non-profit organizations. These clubs provide a safe and inclusive space for girls to explore their interest in technology. Through workshops, mentorship programs, and networking events, girls gain exposure to various tech fields and connect with like-minded individuals and role models. Such communities play a vital role in building confidence, breaking stereotypes, and encouraging girls to pursue tech careers.

In Canada, some universities have launched "Tech Scholarships for Women" to attract and support female students pursuing tech-related degrees. The primary objective of these scholarships is to address the gender disparity in the field of technology education by offering financial support to exceptionally skilled female students. By removing financial

barriers, universities encourage more girls to pursue tech education and prepare them for future opportunities in the tech industry.

Additionally, in Kenya, the "Tech Bootcamps for Girls" initiative introduces girls to coding and digital skills training in primary and secondary schools. By integrating tech education into the curriculum, this initiative promotes early exposure to tech careers and fosters interest in the field from a young age.

To further encourage girls and women in tech, implementing industry mentorship programs can be highly effective. Real-case examples from the United States demonstrate how tech companies have established "Women in Tech Mentorship Programs." These programs pair female tech professionals with experienced mentors who guide and support them in their careers. Mentorship provides valuable insights, networking opportunities, and personal development, empowering women to thrive in the tech industry.

5.3.7   Challenges within Women Themselves

Addressing the challenges that women face within themselves is a critical aspect of fostering gender diversity and empowering women in the tech industry. The research recognizes that self-doubt and a lack of confidence can hinder women from advocating for themselves and showcasing their abilities effectively.

In Sweden, real-life examples demonstrate the success of "Women Empowerment Workshops" for female tech professionals. These workshops focus on building self-confidence and leadership skills, providing a supportive environment for discussing experiences and overcoming self-doubt. Participants gain the tools and mindset to assert themselves confidently at work.

In India, the "Lean In Circles" initiative is popular in addressing internal challenges faced by women in tech. These circles create a sense of community, where women support each other, share growth stories, and engage in peer mentoring and group discussions. Through this, they recognize their strengths and potential, embracing leadership opportunities by overcoming self-doubt.

Additionally, launching "Women in Tech Awards" can celebrate the achievements of women in the tech industry and recognize their valuable contributions. These awards not only honour individual accomplishments but also inspire other women to pursue their aspirations with renewed confidence.

5.3.8   Enhancing Maternity Leave Support for Companies

The provision of support from the government to companies that offer at least partial coverage of maternity leave for female workers is essential in fostering a more inclusive and

sustainable workforce. By taking this initiative, the government not only encourages gender equality in the workplace but also supports companies' operational continuity and alleviates the burden of expenses associated with maternity leave.

When companies extend maternity leave benefits to their female employees, it demonstrates a commitment to creating a family-friendly work environment and acknowledges the significance of work-life balance. However, covering the entire cost of maternity leave can be financially challenging for many companies, especially smaller businesses. Therefore, government support in subsidizing a portion of the maternity leave expenses can ease the financial strain on businesses and encourage more companies to implement such policies.

Moreover, enhancing maternity leave support can lead to positive outcomes for the workforce as a whole. When female employees receive adequate maternity leave benefits, they are more likely to return to work after childbirth, contributing to reduced turnover rates and increased employee loyalty. Additionally, these measures contribute to narrowing the gender pay gap and ensuring equal opportunities for career advancement for women.

5.3.9   Incorporating Workforce Shortage in Risk Management

Companies must be proactive in addressing the potential impact of workforce shortages due to maternity leave. By including this factor in their risk management strategies, companies can better prepare and find effective solutions to mitigate any adverse effects on their operations.

One practical approach is for companies to implement workforce planning that considers the potential loss of talent during maternity leave periods. Identifying critical roles and responsibilities within the organization and cross-training employees for backup support can help maintain operational continuity during temporary absences. Additionally, companies can explore the possibility of hiring temporary assistants to support employees taking parental leave, ensuring that workload remains manageable and productivity levels are sustained.

5.3.10   Developing or Reforming Compensation Systems

To promote fairness and transparency in compensation within the tech industry, a promising approach is the establishment of a government-level database. In this database, companies would be required to anonymously share salary information for different positions, providing insights into industry-wide compensation practices. By outlining employee expertise, such as years of experience and knowledge, this data analysis would offer a basis for determining industry average salary levels in Slovenia, categorized by position and skillset.

The implementation of such a database would empower employees with valuable information about the appropriateness of their compensation relative to their skills and

experience. Armed with this knowledge, individuals can make informed decisions about their careers and advocate for fair remuneration.

To further enhance the system, the database could be equipped with predictive capabilities, projecting potential salary growth based on an employee's accumulated experience and the country's economic conditions, including factors like inflation rates. This forecasting feature would enable employees to evaluate proposed salaries and anticipate their financial growth over time.

This comprehensive approach would foster collaboration between companies and employees, fostering a culture of fairness and recognition for hard work. By envisioning a future of equitable compensation systems and enhanced transparency, we can create an environment where every individual feels valued and motivated to excel. Embracing these changes will lead us towards a more promising future for the tech industry and beyond.

5.4   Suggestions for Further Research

In pursuit of comprehensive insights into gender equality and diversity initiatives within the tech industry, this chapter offers valuable suggestions for further research. Exploring these areas will contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities involved in promoting inclusivity and equal opportunities.

1. Impact of Company Size on Gender Equality and Pay Gap
Conducting research across companies of varying sizes will shed light on how company size affects gender equality and the pay gap. By analyzing data from small, medium, and large organizations, researchers can uncover patterns and disparities that may exist. This research will help identify specific challenges faced by companies of different sizes in fostering an inclusive work environment.
2. Perspectives from Companies
Gaining insights directly from tech companies themselves will provide a more comprehensive understanding of their efforts and experiences in promoting diversity and inclusion. Interviews and surveys with company leaders can reveal their strategies, successes, and challenges in creating a gender-balanced workplace.
3. Examining Hiring Practices and Gender Preferences
Research with hiring managers, both within tech companies and external hiring firms, will explore if there are any gender preferences during the hiring process and for specific positions. Understanding potential biases will enable the development of targeted interventions to ensure fair and equal recruitment practices.
4. Generational Attitudes and Diversity Initiatives
Further research on generational attitudes towards diversity and equality initiatives, particularly among Gen X, Gen Z, and Millennials, will provide insights into the differences among generations. This exploration can help tailor diversity initiatives to resonate with the values and expectations of the younger workforce.

5. Awareness of Government and Institutional Policies

Investigating employees' familiarity with government and institutional policies affecting gender equality and career advancement is essential. Understanding the level of awareness will highlight areas for improvement in disseminating information about these policies to ensure employees are well-informed.

6. Global Database of Transparency Strategies Employed by Companies Worldwide

Investigating the strategies implemented and designed by large multinational companies to increase transparency and create a knowledge base is crucial for promoting fairness and equal opportunities in the workplace. By understanding these strategies, organizations can identify best practices and areas for improvement, leading to a more informed and empowered workforce.

6   CONCLUSION

The study reveals that job decisions in the technology sector are notably influenced by cultural and social factors. The early development of biases has a significant impact on individuals' opinions regarding appropriate career choices for individuals of different genders. Societal norms frequently exert pressure on individuals, compelling them to conform to conventional gender roles, which may discourage women from pursuing jobs in the field of technology. Role models, including family members and teachers, have a significant impact on fostering interest in technology disciplines. However, there are variations in the extent to which these role models inspire individuals of different genders.

The study reveals findings pertaining to career progressions and patterns of advancement, shedding light on biases in the recruiting process, techniques employed during negotiations, and disparities in proactive behaviors. The acquisition of negotiation skills is of utmost importance in securing equitable compensation, frequently characterized by gender-specific strategies. There is a tendency for men to exhibit greater proactivity in negotiating salary increases, but women's hesitancy to initiate such negotiations can impede their professional progress. This behavior is a contributing element to the gender pay gap, which is further encouraged by several factors such as the presence of a "boys' club" mentality, certain personality traits, and a lack of transparency regarding compensation information.

This study examines policies and programs that are designed to address and reduce the gender pay gap. The implementation of parental leave regulations and work-life balance policies is crucial in providing support to families and cultivating a conducive work environment. However, the study unveiled that a majority of individuals exhibit a lack of awareness regarding the aforementioned regulations. The implementation of fair hiring processes, the monitoring of gender equality initiatives, and the recognition of varied experiences by companies are factors that contribute to the cultivation of a more inclusive atmosphere.

In general, the research findings underscore the notion that gender discrepancies arise as a result of inadequate representation, particularly among occupations that offer higher levels of remuneration. The research emphasizes the significance of increasing the representation of women in technology positions and cultivating an environment that promotes inclusivity. Furthermore, this observation highlights the changing attitudes towards gender equality within the younger cohort, whose decision-making is guided by their beliefs and dedication to promoting diversity. These factors have the potential to influence the creation of a fairer and more balanced workforce and work environment in the future.

In summary, the findings of this study provide a thorough comprehension of the intricate factors contributing to the gender wage disparity observed in the technology sector. By acknowledging and mitigating prejudices, ensuring transparency, enacting equitable rules, and cultivating an inclusive environment, the sector may make substantial progress in reducing the gender pay gap and advancing a workforce that is more diverse and equitable. The dedication of the younger generation towards jobs that prioritize purpose and advocate for gender equality holds great potential in catalyzing significant and impactful shifts within the technology industry and other spheres.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Summary (Slovenian Language)

Razlika v plačilu med spoloma ostaja pomembno vprašanje v panogi informacijske tehnologije, kjer ženske v povprečju zaslužijo 16 odstotkov manj kot moški na podobnih položajih. Pojav omenjene razlike se lahko pripisuje različnim dejavnikom, vključno z nezavedno pristranskostjo, pomanjkanjem raznolikosti na višjih upravljavskih položajih in še vedno prisotnim spolnim stereotipiziranjem. Poleg tega se ženske med svojo kariero pogosto srečujejo z ovirami pri pogajanjih in napredovanju zaradi zakoreninjenih pričakovanj o vlogi spola. Segregacija poklicev v informacijski in komunikacijski tehnologiji (IKT) predstavlja dodaten izziv za poklicni napredek žensk. Znatna razlika v plačilu med spoloma ostaja prisotna zaradi dejavnikov, kot so družinske obveznosti, izzivi transparentnosti in splošno oklevanje pri vključevanju v pogajanja.

Cilj magistrske naloge je bil preučiti različne elemente, ki prispevajo k razliki v plačilu med spoloma, in analizirati možne pristope za odpravo plačnih nesorazmerij, kot na primer uvedba zakonodaje o enakem plačilu, programi raznolikosti, mentorstvo in spodbujanje k vodenju. Kot tehniki analize podatkov za namen prepoznavanja tematik in vzorcev sta bili uporabljeni abduktivna analiza in sistematična metodologija. Za pridobitev vpogleda v izkušnje in stališča zaposlenih so bili opravljeni intervjuji s tehnološkimi delavci obeh spolov.

Postopek pridobivanja kandidatov za intervju je vključeval uporabo več kanalov, saj sem želela vključiti udeležence z različnimi perspektivami. Sodelujoči so pred intervjujem prejeli obrazec za podpis soglasja o sodelovanju v intervjuju, vključno z opisom njihovih pravic. Intervjuji so bili transkribirani in nato organizirani v tematske kategorije in podkategorije, kar je razkrilo pomembne ugotovitve v zvezi z razlikami v plačilu med spoloma. Ugotovitve kažejo, da na poklicne preference v tehnološki industriji opazno vplivajo kulturni in družbeni dejavniki, ki jih pogosto oblikujejo vnaprej določena prepričanja in prevladujoči družbeni standardi. Vzorniki imajo ključno vlogo pri spodbujanju zanimanja za področja, ki so povezana s tehnologijo.

Raziskava prikazuje vpogled v pristranskost med zaposlitvenim procesom, različne načine pogajalskih strategij in vpliv proaktivnega vedenja na poklicno napredovanje. Študija je razkrila, da so veščine pogajanja ključne za zagotavljanje poštenega in enakega plačila. Moški so običajno bolj nagnjeni k proaktivnemu pogajanju, medtem ko lahko oklevanje žensk ovira njihov napredek pri poklicnem uspehu. Razlika v plačilu med spoloma pa je še toliko večja zaradi dejavnikov, kot sta »the boy's club mindset« (način razmišljanja, ki ga imajo organizacije, kjer prevladujejo moški in kjer so ženske izključene ali obravnavane kot manjvredne) in pomanjkanje odprtosti.

Uvedene so bile različne strategije za reševanje vprašanja razlike v plačilu med spoloma, vključno s sprejetjem zakonodaje o starševskem dopustu, uvedbo ukrepov za usklajevanje dela in življenja, sprejemanjem pravičnih postopkov zaposlovanja, uvedbo programov za

enakost spolov in priznavanjem različnih izkušenj. Številne druge raziskave so ugotovile, da je uvedba ukrepov, usmerjenih v povečanje števila žensk na bolje plačanih položajih in spodbujanje vključujočega delovnega okolja, ključna za dosego enakosti. Poleg tega mlajše generacije kažejo, da se njihov pogled na enakost spolov spreminja, kar bi lahko povzročilo pomembne spremembe znotraj panoge.

Študija omogoča celovito razumevanje kompleksnih elementov, ki prispevajo k razliki v plačilu med spoloma v tehnološki panogi. Z aktivnim zmanjševanjem predsodkov, ustanavljanjem transparentnih praks, sprejemanjem pravičnih predpisov in spodbujanjem vključevanja ima sektor velik potencial za napredek pri zmanjševanju razlike. Poleg tega pa zavezanost mlajše generacije k spodbujanju raznolikosti in enakosti ponuja pomembne priložnosti za ustvarjanje velikih pozitivnih sprememb ne samo v tehnološki panogi, ampak tudi na ostalih področjih.

Za učinkovito spodbujanje raznolikosti in vključenosti na področju tehnologije je ključno sprejeti celovit pristop, ki vključuje več elementov, kot so zagovorništvo, transparentnost, sistemi podpore in kulturna preobrazba. Pobude, kot je kanadski projekt na temo raznolikosti spolov v tehnološki panogi (Gender and Diversity in Technology), so primeri dobrih praks, ki spodbujajo enake možnosti, vključujočo korporativno kulturo in aktivno delovanje na področju enakopravnega zastopstva.

Transparentnost je ključen element, ki razkriva pristope v procesu zaposlovanja in informacije o plačah. Zakonodaja v Belgiji, ki se opira na analize o razlikah v plačilu med spoloma, je še en dober primer, kako lahko transparentnost odpravlja razlike v plačah.

Da ima razvijanje sposobnosti žensk velik pomen, kaže tudi finski program (Leadership from Every Seat), ki daje prednost razvoju vodstvenih veščin ne glede na spol. Programi mentorstva in sponzorstva imajo ključno vlogo pri njihovih odgovornostih. Ti napori spodbujajo integracijo žensk in slabše zastopanih skupin, saj jim omogočajo dostop do socialnih mrež in nudijo priložnosti, ki spodbujajo njihov poklicni razvoj. Nemčija je izboljšala spolno raznolikost na vodstvenih položajih z uvedbo »ženskih kvot«. Prisotnost transparentnosti komunikacije je mogoče opaziti še v švedski pobudi za enakost v tehnoloških panogah (Tech Equity Pledge), kjer spodbujajo deljenje podatkov o različnih prizadevanjih za raznolikost in vključenost. Da je razvoj zaposlovanja v tehnološkem sektorju izjemno pomemben, dodatno dokazujejo še Združene države Amerike, ki so uvedle program za ženske (Tech Transition Program), pa tudi vključitev tehnoloških izobraževanj v učni načrt osnovnih šol v Singapurju in na Finskem.

Švedska je z delavnicami za opolnomočenje žensk (Women Empowerment Workshops) naslovila tudi problematiko nezaupanja vase pri ženski populaciji. Poleg tega je bilo ugotovljeno, da je zagotavljanje podpore za starševski dopust izjemnega pomena in vlade imajo pristojnost, da podjetjem pomagajo na tem področju. Zmanjševanje kadrovskega primanjkljaja med porodniškim dopustom zahteva uvedbo proaktivnih strategij, kot sta

prečno usposabljanje in začasno zaposlovanje. Izboljšanje transparentnosti glede plač bi bilo mogoče doseči z uvedbo vladnih baz podatkov, ki bi zaposlenim zagotavljale dragocene informacije o plačnih podrobnostih.

Appendix 2: Example of Consent From

Hello [Participant Name],

My name is Svetlana Fuks, and I am conducting this interview as part of my master's thesis research on the gender pay gap in the tech industry. I would like to invite you to participate in a research study about the gender pay gap in the tech industry. My goal is to understand the experiences and perceptions of [female/male] tech professionals regarding the gender pay gap, as well as to gain insight from male tech professionals on this issue.

If you decide to participate, I will ask you to take part in a one-on-one interview with me. The interview will last around 30-45 minutes and will be recorded for research purposes only. After the interview, the audio recording will be transcribed, and the data collected will be used for research purposes only. You can withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.

I want to assure you that participating in this study carries no known risks. However, I understand that discussing personal experiences related to the gender pay gap can be uncomfortable. While there are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study, your contribution will help me gain a better understanding of the gender pay gap in the tech industry.

I want to emphasize that all information collected during the study will be kept confidential and anonymous. Your name and identifying information will not be used in any research publications or presentations. The audio recordings and transcripts will be stored securely on a password-protected computer, and access will be limited to me. If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please feel free to contact me at any time.

By agreeing to participate in this study, you acknowledge that you have read and understood the information provided in this consent form, and that you freely consent to participate in this study.

Thanks for considering my invitation!

Appendix 3: Interview Guide (Female & Male)

1. Could you please describe briefly what you do?

2. How many hours do you work a week?

3. Can you name a role model in technology who has inspired you to consider a career in technology and why?

4. To what extent do societal and cultural pressures impact career choices in math and science?

4.1. Can you provide particular cases or personal examples of such pressures and their influence on career decisions?

5. Which factors made you feel comfortable pursuing a promotion or applying for a job without meeting all the position's qualifications?

6. What, if any, gender bias or preconceptions have you noticed during the hiring process?

7. Tell me about your salary negotiation experiences. What happened if you ever tried to negotiate your pay in the past? What variables contribute to your comfort level when it comes to compensation negotiations? How comfortable do you feel overall? How do you see your gender affecting this process?

8. When considering the tech industry, what are some factors that you believe contribute to differences in compensation between individuals with similar qualifications and experience?

9. What is your perspective on the perception that one gender is inherently superior or more effective than the other in the tech industry?

9.1. How do you think such concepts, if present, contribute to gender inequality, specifically within the tech sector?

10. How would you describe your perspective on the gender imbalance in senior management positions? Is it, in your opinion, equal or unequal?

11. Based on the 2023 data, the uncontrolled gender pay gap has improved, with women now earning $0.83 for every $1 earned by men, showing progress in closing the gap. However, the controlled gender pay gap remains at $0.99 for every $1 earned by men, indicating persistent disparities. How do you see the gender pay differences in your industry?

12. How do you think factors like work experience, work hours, and personal/family responsibilities contribute to compensation disparities in the tech industry?

13. How do policies and regulations impact gender equality in terms of pay, promotions, and opportunities for career advancement at the workplace?

14. What are your thoughts on the potential career impact of a prolonged absence from work?

15. Specifically, in your perspective, how do parental leave laws affect the gender pay gap?

16. How do you think the tech industry can address the gender pay disparities and promote gender equality in the workplace?

Appendix 4: Acknowledgment of AI-powered Language Enhancement Tool Usage

In the context of this master's thesis, the utilization of Quillbot played a significant role in refining the material, therefore warranting acknowledgement for its vital contribution. The improvement of textual quality and coherence can be attributed significantly to the recommendations provided by Quillbot for enhancing text style, refining grammar, and optimizing language usage.

It is imperative to clarify that Quillbot was solely utilized for the purpose of enhancing text organization and grammar, with no engagement in content creation. The advanced algorithms and natural language processing capabilities of Quillbot aided in detecting probable grammatical problems, proposing improvements to vocabulary, and suggesting alternate sentence structures during the writing process. This undertaking finally resulted in increased clarity and comprehensibility within the parameters of this thesis.

The integration of Quillbot into the writing process highlights the increasing importance of technology in the domain of scholarly research and writing. The application of artificial intelligence-powered language tools to augment scholarly communication underscores the beneficial influence of technology on the process of academic writing.

Appendix 5: Themes, Subthemes and Definitions

Table 3: Themes, subthemes, and their definition

Themes	Subthemes	Definition
Job Application and Hiring Insights.	Company culture values	The overall atmosphere and values projected by the company, often perceived through social media or other means.
	Perfect match	Confidence in one's skills and competence when switching jobs or assessing their own abilities.
	Skill assessment bias	Understanding that decision-makers have personal and subjective opinions
	Inaccurate requirements	Realizing that job postings may include unnecessary or unclear requirements
	Boys-club	Observing instances where predominantly male CEOs or employees form exclusive networks or clubs that may hinder gender diversity.
	Specificity of work matters	The concept that certain industries, roles, or job positions may exhibit varying levels of gender balance and opportunities based on the nature and requirements of the work involved.
	Suspicion	Noticing biases based on gender, attractiveness, or intelligence, where individuals may feel intimidated by someone they perceive as superior.
Bias at workplace	Age and gender	Acknowledging that younger individuals in higher positions may face biases or even more extreme forms of discrimination.
	Creating professional image	Leveraging remote work to establish professionalism without physical presence.

Table 3: Themes, subthemes, and their definition (cont.)

Themes	Subthemes	Definition
Cultural and social pressures	Traditional bias	Being influenced by traditional gender biases in society shape perceptions of suitable career paths for men and women.
	Family and social media	Describing the influence of family members and social media platforms in shaping societal expectations and perceptions regarding gender-specific career choices.
Pay Disparity and Negotiations	Boys-club	Noting that companies may undervalue women's work due to factors like family-related absences, ultimately resulting in unequal pay.
	Job hopping	Observing discrepancies in salary and career progression between individuals who stay with a company long-term and those who switch jobs.
	Performance-based compensation	Highlighting the correlation between exceptional performance, contributions to the company, and the potential for salary increases or promotions regardless of gender.
	Social dynamics	Recognizing the influence of interpersonal relationships and connections on salary and advancement, beyond documented work contributions.
	Transparency	Valuing transparent structures within a company enables employees to challenge and improve existing systems.
	Specificity of work matters	The concept is that certain industries, roles, or job positions may exhibit varying levels of gender balance and opportunities based on the nature and requirements of the work involved.
	Visibility bias	Observing a discrepancy between men and women in self-promotion skills during performance reviews, potentially impacting their ability to secure salary increases or promotions.
	Project acquisition	Describing the importance of networking, negotiation, and leveraging personal connections to secure desired positions or promotions.

Table 3: Themes, subthemes, and their definition (cont.)

	Strategic patience	Emphasizing the long-term approach to career growth and acknowledging that initial compromises may lead to desired advancements in the future.
	Personality	Recognizing individual variations in personality traits, regardless of gender, and their influence on job performance and career progression.
	Counter offer	Highlighting the effectiveness of presenting competitive offers from other companies or competitors to enhance negotiation outcomes.
	Ambition and proactiveness	Recognizing the importance of embracing challenges, taking initiative, and expressing ambition to pursue higher positions or career opportunities.
	Adaptability and growth mindset	Highlighting the necessity of continuously learning, adapting, and expanding one's skills to align with the evolving needs and expectations of the company.
	Strategic negotiation	Referring to the strategic approach of assessing alternatives, conducting market research, and leveraging market knowledge to negotiate salary and promotion terms.
	Measurable impact	Recognizing the importance of demonstrating tangible contributions and the value added to the company's success during negotiation discussions.
Gender affects negotiation	Lack of self-confidence and experience	Perceiving differences in confidence levels between men and women during negotiations and the emphasis on self-presentation.
	Perception effect	Noting that expectations and self-perception may vary between genders, with some individuals undervaluing themselves or having higher expectations based on gender.
	Framework	Recognizing that salary ranges within a company are based on levels and not specifically influenced by gender.

Gender affects negotiation	Fear of pay discussion	Observing differences in how men and women approach salary discussions, with women often taking on more responsibilities in hopes of proving their worth.
Gender balance in senior level	Boys club and Competence bias	Perceiving doubts and scrutiny towards women in senior positions, questioning their abilities to perform at the required level.
	Females are good managers	Recognizing examples of successful female managers who defy stereotypes and excel in leadership roles.
	Leadership resilience	Acknowledging the challenges faced by women in leadership positions, balancing career demands with family responsibilities.
	Trust building	Understanding the importance of trust within male-dominated environments for women to secure leadership positions.
	Equal opportunity	Acknowledging the potential for women to achieve senior positions in IT if they invest the same amount of time, talent, and negotiation skills as men.
	Hybrid jobs	Referring to supporting roles that are predominantly occupied by women, such as HR or finance positions.
Gender inequality	Gender imbalance at faculties	Observing the discrepancy in gender distribution across faculties, with some faculties having a majority of one gender.
	Gendered-assignments	Describing industries or roles that are primarily associated with one gender based on customer preferences or industry trends.
Gender superiority	Self-confidence	Recognizing the impact of self-belief and assertiveness in overcoming gender-based treatment or biases in the workplace.
	Male-dominance	Acknowledging the higher representation of males in the technology industry while emphasizing the equality of individuals' qualities and skills.
	Occupational segregation	Observing the perception that certain industries or roles are more suitable for one gender over another, is often due to societal stereotypes.

Leadership	Pay-equity awareness	Highlighting instances where discrepancies in pay are identified and addressed to ensure equal compensation for individuals in similar positions.
	Childcare	Addressing the challenges faced by parents, including both men and women, in managing work responsibilities alongside childcare duties.
	Prolonged absence	Identifying strategies and approaches to accommodate prolonged absences, such as parental leave, while maintaining an individual's value and contribution to the company.
	Empathy and support	Emphasizing the importance of managerial empathy and support towards employees' personal circumstances, such as family emergencies or childcare responsibilities.
Prolonged absence and Maternity leave	Gender discrimination	Illustrating instances where gender-based discrimination occurs in the workplace, particularly related to salary negotiations or career advancement opportunities.
	Unique circumstances and contribution	Recognizing individual circumstances, promoting returning employees, and valuing contributions during absences.
	Gender-bias	Highlighting the presence of biased judgments or assumptions based on gender, particularly when it comes to managing work-life balance or prioritizing family responsibilities.
	Resource limitations	Observing how smaller companies may face greater challenges in providing support during maternity leave or accommodating the absence of employees.
	Specificity of work matters	The concept that certain industries, roles, or job positions may exhibit varying levels of gender balance and opportunities based on the nature and requirements of the work involved.
	Operational continuity	Addressing the need to maintain smooth operations and business continuity when employees, particularly key personnel, take prolonged absences or leave.

Prolonged absence and Maternity leave	Missed opportunities	Recognizing the potential for missed opportunities for career advancement and development if an employee's achievements and potential contributions are not properly recognized or valued.
Parental leave laws	Work-life balance	Addressing the importance of policies and regulations that support a healthy balance between work responsibilities and personal/family life.
	Workarounds for companies	Describing alternative arrangements or strategies used by companies to manage challenges associated with maternity leave or employee absences.
	Merit-based hiring	Emphasizing the importance of evaluating candidates based on merit, qualifications, and suitability for the role rather than solely considering gender for the sake of meeting diversity regulations.
	Monitoring gap	Highlighting the need for proper monitoring and evaluation of gender equality initiatives to ensure their effectiveness and address any discrepancies or shortcomings.
Role model	Family member	Referring to family members, such as parents or siblings, who serve as role models and inspire interest in technology-related fields or careers.
	Educational institutions	Highlighting the role of professors and teachers who serve as role models and inspire students to pursue careers in computer science or technology-related fields.
	Digital divide	Addressing the disparity in digital competencies among different age groups and the need to bridge the gap by providing training and education opportunities.
Work experience and hours	Skills matter	Recognizing that the criteria for salary and recognition should be based on individuals' skills, competencies, and performance rather than solely on work experience or hours worked.
	Quality beats quantity	Emphasizing the importance of delivering high-quality work and outcomes rather than focusing solely on the number of hours worked or time spent on tasks.
	Culture fit bias	Addressing the bias that can arise in hiring processes when a candidate's unwillingness to conform to a company's culture is perceived as a negative factor, potentially affecting gender diversity.

Source: Own work.