

Corporate Sustainability Initiatives in Gender Equality: Organizational Practices Fostering Inclusiveness at Work in an Emerging-Market Context

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The objective of this paper is to explore through in-depth interviews the reasons why diversity management initiatives targeting women is an important strategic management issue for companies. Interviewed are the human resource managers of two of Turkey's leading business groups: a manager from the HR department of one of Turkey's largest banks and the deputy general manager of a non-governmental organization. The evidence suggests that these firms exercise carefully honed policies aimed at fostering gender equality and to that end engage in a variety of activities targeting various human resource functions. Their motives appear to be to reinforce their corporate image, enhance employee satisfaction, and reap such anticipated rewards as greater productivity and increased innovation capability. The importance of company leadership is underlined as an antecedent to the adoption of gender-equality focussed diversity management. The study may have important implications for building sustainable corporate brands, especially in the emerging-market context.

Keywords: Diversity management; inclusion; gender equality; corporate social responsibility; sustainability; innovation; corporate brand; emerging markets; Turkey.

1. Introduction

The United Nations Global Compact initiative was launched in the year 2000 to encourage businesses worldwide to adopt sustainable and socially responsible policies. The Global Compact defined sustainability as “[a] company’s delivery of long-term value in financial, social, environmental, and ethical terms” [United Nations Global Compact (2013, p. 4)]. The 10 principles of the Global Compact include the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation (Principle 6), according to which businesses assume responsibility for ascertaining equality in employment to women as well as to other disadvantaged groups [United Nations Global Compact (2016a)].

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Turkey joined in the Global Compact shortly after the initiative's launch. In 2002, the Global Compact Local Network was introduced in Turkey by the United Nations Development Program in partnership with Turkish Confederation of Employer Associations, TISK [United Nations Global Compact (2016b)], and after a decade of focussing on enhancing cooperation between the United Nations, Turkey, and other relevant partners, it was relaunched in 2013 as "a platform, in cooperation between TUSIAD (Turkish Industry and Business Association) and TISK" [United Nations Global Compact (2016b)]. At the time of writing, the organization had 247 participants from Turkey [United Nations Global Compact (2018)].

The business discourse on gender equality at work appears to have increased in Turkey in recent years. Conceivably, this interest may have arisen because of the work of the United Nations Development Program and some government initiatives at the national level. Nonetheless, the rise in interest is obvious through media announcements of some business groups of their action plans regarding gender equality at work. How prevalent and deep-reaching the increased corporate interest in gender equality will prove remains to be seen, but this interest may yield some useful organizational practices. Our aim in this paper is to examine the women-related policies of two of Turkey's most prominent business groups and one of Turkey's largest banks and, relying also on the experience of a non-governmental organization, inductively determine some best practices. Compared with their developed-market rivals, emerging-market companies as they internationally expand face the challenges of inexperience, lack of resources and capabilities, the market dominance of well-established rivals, and consumer loyalty to existing brands [Cuervo-Cazurra and Genc (2008)]. Their success in overcoming those challenges lies partly in their ability to leverage their human capital and to innovate [see, for example, Chattopadhyay *et al.* (2012)]. Gender diversity has been cited as one of the factors leading to corporate innovation [e.g. Ostergaard *et al.* (2011)], as will be discussed at greater length below. In contrast, the institutional environment of emerging markets may be characterized by weak legal institutions and high ownership concentration [e.g., Khanna and Palepu (1997), Khanna and Palepu (2000)], which may impede gender diversity. Consequently, examining the gender-diversity initiatives and human resource management practices of emerging-market companies may yield important insights into diversity management. Furthermore, those practices may improve the competitive advantage of Turkish multinationals who are faced with the challenges of an increasingly more demographically diverse workforce in the markets where they operate and have implications for other firms from emerging markets. This research thus contributes to the literature by providing a qualitative analysis of the gender-related diversity initiatives in an emerging market context, with a particular focus on innovation.

This paper has been structured as follows: First, the theoretical foundations motivating this study are discussed. Then, the underlying methodology is presented. Next, the results from the interviews are considered. Finally, some managerial and policy implications are presented, limitations of the study are indicated, and avenues for further research are proposed.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1. *The case for gender diversity in the workplace*

The gender-and-organization literature dates back to the 1960s and 1970s, as chronicled by Calas *et al.* (2014/2016, p. 17), and encompasses many theoretical strands including but not limited to sociology, psychology, social psychology, and management [Calas *et al.* (2014/2016)]. The debate around gender diversity in the workplace originally rested on issues of fairness and equality and later shifted to a focus on how gender diversity makes better business sense [Calas *et al.* (2014/2016)].

The business case for gender diversity is based on the premise that diversity provides a multiplicity of perspectives, skills, and insights, which can increase the group's creativity and problem-solving capabilities and thereby enhance performance [Cox and Blake (1991)]. Based on human capital theory [Becker (1964), as cited in Grugulis (2006)], this perspective argues that the broad range of skills, qualifications, experience, training, and expertise [Crawford (1991), as cited in Dessler (2011, p. 40)] contained within a diverse workforce provides a competitive advantage for the employer firm. Here are some of the ways in which diversity may benefit the firm [Robinson and Dechant (1997), as cited in Cassell (2006, p. 310)]: Cost savings may result from decreased turnover and absenteeism and the avoidance of lawsuits; a diverse workforce may be better equipped to understand an increasingly diverse marketplace, may produce higher-quality problem-solving, enhance leadership effectiveness, build effective global relationships, and increase creativity and innovation.

Thus, fostering gender equality emerges as an imperative when business sustainability is concerned. Furthermore, a company that is known as an inclusive, gender-equal workplace is likely to attract a larger pool of qualified women and other minority applicants for the jobs it has to offer [Cox and Blake (1991)]. Thus, in order to attract the best talent, companies need to reach out to an increasingly diverse labor pool [Konrad (2003), as cited in Jayne and Dipboye (2004)]. Finally, just as the labor pool is becoming increasingly more diverse, so are customers; and effective handling of those diverse customers also requires a diverse workforce.

Reviews of the literature on the link between gender diversity and performance have pointed to such organizational benefits as higher financial performance [Eagly *et al.* (2014/2016)], enhanced creativity, improved innovation capacity, better problem-solving, and higher group performance [Anita Borg Institute (2014)], and ability to attract a more qualified workforce as a result of enhanced company reputation [e.g. Cox and Blake (1991)]. The research has mostly focussed on diversity in top management teams, as noted by Eagly *et al.* [2014/2016], but some studies have included more levels of management [e.g. Dwyer *et al.* (2003)].

The influences of the resource-based view of the firm and contingency theory are acknowledged in this study. The resource-based view of the firm argues that firms obtain sustainable competitive advantages by developing and controlling strategic resources that are valuable, rare, non-substitutable, and not easily imitated [Barney (1991)]. Knowledge-based resources are one group of strategic resources that

will deliver sustained competitive advantage to the company that knows how to leverage it [Barney (1991)]. Some research suggests that demographic diversity in the workforce leads to creativity, innovation, and improved group problem-solving [Konrad (2003), as cited in Jayne and Dipboye (2004)] and is a “knowledge-based” resource [Richard *et al.* (2013)].

The research evidence regarding the relationship between gender diversity and such positive outcomes appears to be mixed, however [e.g. Williams and O’Reilly’s meta-analysis (1998), as cited in Ostergaard *et al.* (2011); Strohmeier *et al.* (2017)], pointing to a contingency perspective that hinges the realization of the full benefits of a gender-diverse workforce on the organizational context.

2.2. Diversity and innovation

The role of human capital as a driver of innovation is acknowledged by research [e.g. Smith *et al.* (2011)]. A rich body of research suggests a positive relationship between diversity in the firm’s knowledge base and the firm’s innovative capabilities [e.g. van Dijk *et al.*’s meta-analysis (2012); Ostergaard *et al.*’s overview (2011)]. Firms with a variety of knowledge, experience, and skills among their employees are better placed to exploit internal and external knowledge, as noted by Ostergaard *et al.* (2011), because more diverse groups can draw from a larger pool of task-relevant information, as noted by van Dijk *et al.* (2012), and have a higher absorptive capacity that allows the firm to make better use of external knowledge [as pointed out by Ostergaard *et al.* (2011) in their review of the research].

Demographic diversity, such as diversity in gender, age, or cultural background, thus increases a firm’s knowledge base, increasing the possibility of innovation. Using a survey of 1,800 professionals, 40 case studies, and focus groups and interviews, Hewlett *et al.* (2013) found that companies whose leadership had both inherent diversity traits (such as gender and ethnicity) and acquired diversity traits (i.e. traits gained through experience such as an appreciation for cultural differences acquired through exposure to foreign cultures) out-innovated and out-performed others. A drawback to increased demographic diversity, however, has been noted as increasing conflict and distrust that may result due to the heterogeneity of the group while less diverse groups may be characterized by more trust and a greater willingness to cooperate [e.g. Tajfel (1982), as cited in van Dijk *et al.* (2012)]. Consequently, researchers have pointed to the role of moderators in the diversity–performance relationship [e.g. van Dijk *et al.* (2012)]. The organizational context is indicated as an important moderator — especially, the organizational climate [e.g. Manoharan and Signal (2017)].

2.3. Women and organizational innovation

A growing body of research seems to support the argument that gender diversity improves a firm’s innovative capabilities. Deszo and Ross [2012] examined gender diversity in top management teams of Fortune 1500 companies and found a positive relationship overall between gender diversity of these teams and firm performance, but this favorable effect was present only in firms whose strategies focussed on

innovation [Deszo and Ross (2012), as cited in Eagly *et al.* (2014/2016), p. 163]. Ruiz-Jimenez and Fuentes-Fuentes [2016] found that gender diversity in the top management team improved both product and process innovation. Considering a broader group of employees than the top management team, Ostergaard *et al.* (2011) also found a positive relationship between gender diversity and the firm's likelihood to innovate. In fact, firms with more balanced gender composition were found to be more likely to innovate compared with firms with high concentration in one gender. Woolley *et al.* [2015] found that groups performed better at an optimal level of demographic diversity, and increasing the proportion of women in the group improved collective intelligence of the group. Contrary to assumptions, the collective intelligence of the group was not determined by the average of the sum of the individual intelligence of the group members, but by the average social perceptiveness of group members. The authors attributed their finding of improved collective intelligence in the presence of a higher proportion of women to the fact that women tended to score higher on social perceptiveness tests.

It should also be noted, however, that as with other aspects of firm performance, some studies suggest a negative relationship between gender diversity and innovation and instead point to job-related diversity as a driver of innovation [e.g. Bell *et al.*'s meta-analysis (2011)]. In their meta-analysis, van Dijk *et al.* [2012] emphasized that the relationship between functional diversity and innovation was stronger than that for gender diversity and innovation but at the same time cautioned that the relationship of diversity with innovation was heterogeneous for both demographic and job-related diversity, calling into question the long-established notion of diversity as a driver of innovation.

Some researchers have also noted that simply diversifying the workforce will not necessarily yield the benefits outlined earlier. Unleashing the full potential of diversity, they have argued, is contingent upon effective management that emphasizes inclusiveness [e.g. Pless and Maak (2004)] and such situational factors as the organizational culture, strategies, and environment [e.g. Elsass and Graves (1997), as cited in Jayne and Dipboye (2004); Richard *et al.* (2013)]. Studying a broader group of managers than just top management teams, Dwyer *et al.* [2003] found that firms with high levels of gender diversity and high growth rates had the highest productivity and that the firm's strategic orientation and the organizational culture moderated the effects of gender diversity at the management level. They concluded that gender diversity in management was positively related to performance when participative strategy making was high; but that the opposite was true when participative strategy making was low. The researchers pointed to the moderating role performed by participative management structures. In other words, the full benefits of gender diversity may be realized only when the organization has the necessary structures to enable all members to cooperate and collaborate across functional roles and when multiple viewpoints are considered. The moderating role of organizational culture has been underlined also in another study that focussed on the effect of employee diversity on innovation and concluded a positive relationship between diversity in gender and the likelihood of introducing an innovation and a positive relationship between an open culture toward diversity and innovative performance

[Ostergaard *et al.* (2011)]. A more recent study suggests that men and women bring the same innate capacity for innovation to the organization, but may respond differently to the organizational climate, which as a result may inhibit women's contribution to innovation [Cropley and Cropley (2017)]. In their study of 142 employees of an Australian advanced manufacturing firm, the researchers found no significant difference between the innovation capacity of men and women, but the increased proportion of women employees in a work group appeared to correlate negatively with the innovation capacity of that group. The researchers suggested that the organizational climate affected men and women differently; the management style, support for innovation, rewards, etc., characterizing organizational culture appeared to suppress the perception of the organization's innovation capacity among women while enhancing it among men.

Pless and Maak [2004] argued that companies use a selective approach in managing diversity, expecting all members of the workforce to assimilate into the pre-defined and dominant corporate culture; thus, assimilation, rather than integration and inclusion, is the approach taken. The "culture of inclusion" [Pless and Maak (2004, p. 130)] the authors proposed is "an organizational environment that allows people with multiple backgrounds, mindsets, and ways of thinking to work effectively together and to perform to their highest potential in order to achieve organizational objectives based on sound principles." The principles Pless and Maak espoused are recognition of differences, reciprocal understanding, trust, integrity, an intercultural moral point of view, openness to plurality of standpoints and "mutual enabling" — allowing "other" voices to speak up and find a common approach [2004, p. 133]. The authors pointed to stages of development in the establishment of such a culture of inclusion: The first stage is that of raising awareness. Then the organization should develop a vision of inclusion, rethink key management concepts and principles, and in the final step adapt its human resource systems and processes. In a more recent study, Shore *et al.* [2018] proposed that an inclusive organization is one where employees at all organizational levels receive inclusive treatment "with associated opportunities to advance to mid- and upper-levels of the organization" (p. 177). To become such an organization, the authors proposed a model in which management should ensure that employees feel safe in expressing views associated with, for example, their gender identity as in a woman employee's expressing the need for equal pay for men and women. Other elements of this culture include employees' feeling involved in the work group; respected and valued. Also, they should have an influence on decision making and be allowed to be transparent about their "valued identities." A final component of the model of Shore *et al.* is "recognizing, honoring, and advancing of diversity" — fair treatment, sharing of employee differences, and top management expressions of valuing diversity through words and actions [2018, p. 185].

The argument that by managing diversity well, companies can benefit from a wider qualified applicant pool, more effective marketing of their products, improved organizational creativity and problem-solving ability, and reduced costs resulting from reduced turnover, reduced absenteeism, and concomitant higher job satisfaction [Cox and Blake (1991)] relies mainly on the resource-based view of the firm.

The mixed evidence provided by research suggests also the contingency view of management. In other words, the benefits of increased creativity and innovation to be realized by gender diversity may be enhanced or inhibited by the organizational environment [e.g. Cropley and Cropley (2017)]. The barriers faced by women in science and technology occupations have been well documented [see, for example, Bagilhole (2014/2016)], and these barriers may be greater in the emerging-market context [see, for example, Chatterjee and Ramu (2018)].

Furthermore, and in line with the contingency view of management, the contextual environment also determines the evolutionary stage of diversity initiatives. As Ricco and Guerci [2014, p. 239] have noted, diversity initiatives may be advanced in some countries and in their infancy in others. To ground our discussion of gender diversity initiatives of organizations, we next turn our attention to the Turkish context and provide a brief historical overview of the legislative framework of women's employment.

2.4. The Turkish context

The Global Gender Gap report released by the World Economic Forum in 2017 ranked Turkey as 131st among 144 countries. The country ranked 128th in economic participation and opportunity of the gap between men and women, 101st with respect to the gap between men's and women's current access to education (educational attainment), and 118th in political empowerment (which measures the gap between men and women at the highest level of political decision making) [World Economic Forum (2017)]. It should also be noted, however, that Turkey granted women the right to vote and to be elected to public office in 1934 — earlier than some Western nations [*Encyclopedia Britannica* (2018)]. Turkey also ranked 105th among 153 countries in the Women, Peace, and Security Index 2017/18; this was 54 places below its income rank [Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace, and Security, (2017), p. 17]. In 2016, the female labor force participation rate in Turkey, which accounts for 1.14% of the world economy with 863.71 billion dollars, is only 32.5% [World Bank (2018)].

Some of the problems faced by women in Turkey in entering employment and in remaining employed are enumerated as urbanization as a result of de-ruralization, which makes it difficult for rural women with insufficient qualifications to find employment in cities, lack of availability of child care institutions (the law stipulates that only those companies with more than 150 women workers are required to provide a child care center for their employees), low education, economic crises, and sociocultural values placing an emphasis on women's role as mothers and wives [Göksel (2013)]. (Please see Table 1 below for a historical overview of the legislative framework of women's employment in Turkey.) Another determinant factor appears to be unequal division of labor at home [Göksel (2013)]. A 2016 report by the International Labour Organization found that in Turkey women devote more than three times as much time to unpaid care work as men do [International Labour Organization (2016, p. 68)].

Recent initiatives undertaken by international bodies in collaboration with local institutions at both the national and local government level and the level of

Table 1. Legislative framework of women's employment in Turkey: A historical overview.

Legislative framework of women's employment in Turkey: A Historical Overview	
1926	Civil Code is adopted which prohibited polygamy, outlawed unilateral divorce, and recognized gender equality in inheritance rights and the custody of children. However, it still defined men as the head of the family and the breadwinner and women as homemakers (Article 154). It also required husbands' permission for women to work (Article 159).
1930	The first regulation regarding protection of women and children (Law No. 1593) is introduced [Özkanlı (2001)]. Maternity leave is granted for the period extending three weeks before delivery and ending three weeks after delivery (Article 155).
1934	Articles 10 and 11 of the constitution of 1924 are amended to enable women of 22 years of age to elect members of parliament (Article 10) and women of 30 years of age to be elected to parliament (Article 11).
1936	Labor Law No. 3008 is introduced and remained in force until 1971. Stipulations were brought regarding maternity leave and working conditions for women.
1945	A social security organization for wage earners (SosyalSigortalarKurumu, SSK) becomes operational in 1945; for civil servants and military personnel, another social security organization is formed in 1949 (EmekliSandigi). In 1971, a third fund is introduced for the self-employed (Bag-Kur). (These insurance schemes were the main providers of social security until 2006, when their provisions and services were gathered under the same roof and eliminated the differentiated services.) Law No. 4772 is introduced in 1945 (Law on work accidents, job-related diseases, and motherhood security).
1946	Multiparty regime begins. A law on social security institutions for workers goes into effect (Law No. 4792). Ministry of Labor is formed. A government agency for the unemployed (İşveİşçiBulmaKurumu) is formed. Following this, UN directives and ILO agreements begin influencing national labor legislation.
1949	Law for the Elderly is introduced (Legislation No. 5417) which stipulated that in order to become eligible for retirement, individuals (the law made no distinction between men and women) had to be 60 years of age (Article 5).
1953	Child care is integrated into Labor Law, whereby companies having more than 150 women employees are required to provide a child care center [Göksel (2013)]. According to a 2013 directive, the child care center is to be utilized by children from 0 to 6 years of age, and if this child care center is not on the premises and distant from the workplace by more than 250 meters, the employer is also required to provide transportation to and from the child care center (Directive on pregnant and nursing women's working conditions and requirements for nursing rooms and child care centers, Official Gazette August 16, 2013, number 28737; Article 13, 2).
1961	Introduction of a new Constitution which defined Turkish state as a welfare state and permitted unionization, collective bargaining, right to strike, paid leave, other rights such as social security, education, housing [Dedeoğlu (2013)].
1964	Social Securities Law (Legislation No. 506) is introduced where for the first time separate provisions were provided for men and women. While the time of service meriting retirement remained the same for both men and women at 25 years (as in the Law for the Elderly), the earliest retirement age for women was set at 55 and for men at 60 (Article 60).
1966	The 1951 ILO agreement stipulating equal pay for equal work for men and women is ratified by Turkey.
1971	Labor Law No. 1475, which was basically the same as the former Labor Law No. 931, is introduced; all of its provisions with the exception of one were repealed in 2003 by Law 4857, the remaining article governs severance pay. According to this article (Article 14), a woman worker who quits her job within the first 12 months of getting married is allowed to collect her accumulated severance pay. Also in 1971 a social security fund for the self-employed (Bag-Kur) is introduced (Law No. 1479) as mentioned above in the entry on the year 1945.

Table 1. (Continued)

Legislative framework of women's employment in Turkey: A Historical Overview	
Early 1980s	In September of 1980, the temporary military government begins, and in 1982 a new Constitution is ushered in by referendum. In March of 1981 a new law amended the Social Security Law (Law No. 506) by reducing the earliest age of retirement eligibility by five years, to 50 for women and 55 for men (Law No. 2422, Article 6). The earliest age for retirement eligibility for men and women was subsequently amended several times over the years. Today women may retire at 40, provided that they have completed 20 years of service and paid 5,000 days of social security premium, and men may retire at 44 if they have completed 24 years of service and paid 5,000 days of social security premium (Article 81, B, a).
1985	Turkey signs the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), adopted by the UN in 1979, and this goes into effect in 1986. The same year Turkey also signs the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies [Özkanlı (2001)].
1987	An advisory board on women-oriented policies is established within Turkey's State Planning Organization.
1989	Turkey approves the European Social Charter, an international agreement containing provisions to secure women's rights [Özkanlı (2001)]. At Istanbul University, Turkey's first center for research and implementation regarding women's issues is established.
1990	A Directorate General on the Status of Women is established as part of the Ministry of Labor and Social Security (Law No. 3670). In 1991 it is brought under the jurisdiction of the Prime Ministry.
1992	The constitutional court abolished Article 159 of the Civil Code, which stipulated that women obtain their husbands' permission in order to be able to work. The decision was published in the Official Gazette (No. 21272; dated 2 July 1992).
1993	Istanbul University establishes Turkey's first master's program in women's studies. In 1996, the program matriculates its first graduates.
2001	In order to harmonize Turkish legislation with that of the EU, a new Civil Code is adopted to go into effect in 2002, which abolished the "head of the family" concept by equalizing the status of husband and wife before the law. It further brought into force a new matrimonial property regime, whereby property acquired during marriage is equally divided between spouses upon divorce.
2002	The provisional protocol for the Convention on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is approved by the Grand National Assembly and thus Turkey became a party to CEDAW.
2003	Labor Law No. 4857 is introduced, and this is the law that is still in existence. It has replaced Law No. 1475 except for the article of the former law governing workers' severance pay. The law prohibits women from working in coal mines or at jobs requiring work under ground or under-water (Article 72). The law further provides women a maternity leave of 16 weeks (Article 74), eight weeks of which may be used before childbirth and the remaining after childbirth, but the woman worker has the right to use up to 13 weeks of her maternity leave after childbirth. (According to the law, she has to stop working three weeks before childbirth.) The law also allows women workers a total of one-and-a-half hours per day for breastfeeding children under one year of age, and the manner in which this leave is to be allotted is left to the discretion of the worker.
2004	Constitutional Amendment (Article 10) deemed the state responsible not only for ensuring non-discrimination between women and men, but also for taking the necessary measures for equality in practice in every field.
2007	As part of the pre-accession financial collaboration between Turkey and the European Union, a project on "Promoting Gender Equality" is introduced to cover 2007 and 2008.

Table 1. (Continued)

Legislative framework of women's employment in Turkey: A Historical Overview	
2008	Law 5510 repealed some of the articles of Social Securities Law No. 506 (of 1964), introducing a stratified retirement eligibility. As it stands today, the law stipulates equalization by 2048 the retirement eligibility age and length of premium payment for men and women.
2009	A committee on the "Equality of Opportunity for Women and Men" in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey was established (KEFEK) by law (Law No. 5840) with the express purpose of "monitoring the domestic and international developments related to the protection and improvement of women's rights and the implementation of equality of women and men, to inform the [Grand National Assembly of Turkey (2017)] about these developments, to discuss the issues assigned as primary or subsidiary duties, and to provide opinions to the expertise commissions on the law drafts and statutory decrees presented at the Assembly" [Ministry of Family and Social Policies in Turkey (2018), p. 13].
2010	A circular was entered into force aimed at "Increasing Women's Employment and Promotion of Equality in Opportunities" (Prime Ministry Circular 2010/14) [Official Gazette (2010)]. The express purpose was "to monitor and evaluate the activities carried out by all stakeholders for identification of existing problems in women's employment and elimination of these problems" [Ministry of Family and Social Policies in Turkey (2018), p. 38].
2011	As an incentive to employers for hiring women above the age of 18 (as well as men between the ages of 18 and 29), the employer's social security contributions are subsidized by the state for up to 54 months (Law No. 6111). Initially granted for five years until the end of 2015, this incentive was extended for another five years at the end of 2015 until 2020.
2012	Within the World Economic Forum organized in Turkey, an initiative called "Gender Parity Task Force of Turkey" is established under the auspices of the Ministry of Family and Social Policies, aimed at reducing the gender-based economic inequality gap. In January 2013, the task force becomes the "Equality at Work Platform" [Ministry of Family and Social Policies in Turkey (2018), p. 42].
2013	A directive governing the working conditions of pregnant or nursing women is introduced. The directive prohibits the employer from assigning pregnant women to night duty from the time pregnancy is recorded by health report to the time of birth and likewise prohibits assignment of night duty to nursing women for up to one year after giving birth (Article 8). Pregnant women receive time off with pay for pre-natal medical examinations (Article 11). A stipulation is the provision of lactation facilities at companies employing between 100 and 150 women and of child care facilities for children of ages 0–6 if the number of women employees is 150 and above (Article 13).
2015	The Council of Higher Education of Turkey institutes a department of Women's Studies and Problems in Academia. A commission is established to carry out studies in this area [Yükseköğretim Kurulu/Council of Higher Education (2017)].
2017 (February)	In a pilot project by the Ministry of Labor and Social Security to initially include only 10 cities, the state grants a monthly payment to grandmothers taking care of their grandchildren while the parents are working.

Sources: The above table was compiled by using a number of sources, in particular, the official Web sites of the Ministry of Labor and Social Security and the Social Security Organization; Ministry of Family and Social Policies; Dedeoğlu [2013]; Ilkkaracan [2012]; Özdemir and Demirkanoglu [2014]; as well as by examining the relevant legislation.

non-governmental organizations include, for example, the launch in 2016 of the initiative “More and Better Jobs for Women: Women’s Empowerment through Decent Work in Turkey” [Kart (2016, May 17)], implemented by the International Labour Organization and Turkish Employment Agency (İŞKUR) with the funding of the Swedish International Development Agency (SEDA) [International Labour Organization (2017)]. The Ministry of Labor and Social Security annually gives an award for gender equality at work [Ministry of Labour and Social Security of The Republic of Turkey (2017)].

The grassroots efforts of local non-governmental organizations such as the association of women entrepreneurs (KAGIDER), which gives gender equality awards to businesses (equal opportunities model certification) since 2011 under technical assistance by the World Bank, and the Mother Child Education Foundation (AÇEV), which provides awareness training to businesses on gender discrimination, also need to be noted. In March of 2017, the number of organizations that had received equal opportunities model certificates from KAGIDER reached 25 [Sözer (2017, March 12, p. 5); Women Entrepreneurs Association of Turkey (2018)].

The attention of business groups in Turkey to women’s issues appears to be growing in recent years. Here are three examples: The country’s largest business group Koç designated the period 2015 through 2017 as “I Support Gender Equality for My Country.” Turkey’s second largest business group Sabancı Holding was the first company to sign the UN Women’s Empowerment Principles and has wide-ranging programs supporting women (Sabancı Holding Annual Report 2016). In 2011, the daily newspaper *Hürriyet* became a founding partner in another initiative — “The Rightful Women Platform,” one of the goals of which was expressed as “helping women attain as soon as possible their rightful place in employment” [*Hürriyet* (2017); Doğan Holding (2017)].

Furthermore, the interest of Turkey’s leading businesses in inclusion appears to embrace also people with disabilities [e.g. Gülsoy (2016); Gülsoy and Evcil (2015)], even though one study found that this interest was limited to fewer than half of Turkey’s largest industrial organizations and concerned mostly activities of community involvement rather than human resource policies and practices [Gülsoy (2016)].

Against this background of heightened public attention, the present inquiry was initiated. In this exploratory study, our investigation revolved around the following questions:

Research Question 1: What type of diversity initiatives aimed at fostering gender equality do Turkey’s leading organizations use?

Research Question 2: What motivated these organizations toward gender equality initiatives?

Research Question 3: What are the organizational results that can be attributed to gender-equality initiatives?

As regards the nature of the diversity initiatives and their organizational impact, we will not form any propositions. Regarding the second research question, we have formulated two propositions:

One of the most important reasons for progress on gender equality initiatives has been cited as top leadership commitment [World Economic Forum (2016, p. 63); US Government Accountability Office (2005), as cited in Kreitz (2008, p. 103); Rynes and Rosen (1995)]. Research on organizational culture suggests that the actions of top management have a major impact on the organization's culture [Nichoff *et al.* (1999), as cited in Robbins and Judge (2007)]. Where the issue may be cast in terms of corporate social responsibility, again top managers are pointed to as the drivers behind it [Swanson (2008); McKinsey and Company (2017)]. This argument leads us to the following proposition:

Proposition 1: *Diversity management initiatives focussing on gender equality are more likely to be adopted by firms that have visible top management support for diversity.*

Morrison [(1992), as cited in Rynes and Rosen (1995)] reported that the top managers of 16 “best practice” firms in diversity management had supported diversity not only out of concerns for fairness, but also as a source of competitive advantage. The competitive advantage thus hoped to be gained would be through such perceived benefits as maintaining and expanding market share, cutting costs, increasing productivity, reducing turnover and absenteeism, and improving employee morale. Other benefits suggested by research are creativity, innovation, and improved problem-solving [Konrad (2003), as cited in Jayne and Dipboye (2004)]. Therefore, similar to Rynes and Rosen (1995), we propose the following:

Proposition 2: *Diversity management initiatives focussing on gender equality are more likely to be adopted by firms where top executives hold positive beliefs about the productivity, innovation, public relations, and morale implications of a more diverse workforce.*

3. Research Method

In this section, we outline the procedures we followed as we investigated our research questions. Also, we briefly describe the context of reference.

This study used the qualitative technique of in-depth interviews with four key informants: two human resource managers from two of Turkey's largest business groups, a manager from the human resources department of one of Turkey's largest banks, and the deputy general manager of an NGO focussed on women's issues. The interviews, conducted during the months of March, April, and May of 2017, lasted at least half an hour (in one case) and on average an hour. Qualitative techniques are especially appropriate where the research is exploratory in nature [Cooper and Schindler (2003)]. Our interviews were semi-structured, whereby we followed an interview protocol outlining the issues to be covered [based in large part on the activities outlined in Jayne and Dipboye (2004)], but occasionally digressed from those questions in order to pursue a potentially fruitful discussion during the course of the interview. The questions were open-ended, and the interviewees were encouraged to raise other matters they considered relevant given the area of focus. The

interviews were conducted at the organizations' headquarters where the interviewee worked. In two of the interviews the first writer of this paper was present, and in the other two both writers were present.

In our research, we have used the business press and other reports to develop a fuller understanding of some of the issues involved and to triangulate the interview data.

We have chosen our informants from the 2016 ranking of Turkey's top women-friendly companies prepared by the business magazine *Capital* [Ayvaci (2016)]. All three companies have a sustained involvement with social issues. The two business groups selected for this study have a long tradition of community involvement, and both can be found at the forefront of a wide variety of corporate social responsibility initiatives, embracing specifically gender equality in recent years. The Koç Group of Companies, Turkey's largest conglomerate and one of the 100 largest publicly traded companies in Europe, has been carrying out themed social responsibility projects with the participation of all Group companies since 2006 under the umbrella theme of "For My Country" [Koç Group Sustainability Report (2015, p. 66)]. For example, the period between 2012 through the first half of 2015 [Koç Group Sustainability Report (2015, p. 66)] focussed on raising awareness about people with disabilities and was themed: "I Know No Barriers For My Country" [Koç Group Annual Report (2014, p. 49)]. In 2015, the Group designated the theme for the period from 2015 through 2017 as "I Support Gender Equality for My Country" [Koç Holding Annual Report (2016, p. 135)], as mentioned in the introduction to this paper. The Group's late Chairman Mustafa Koç was one of the 10 global impact champions for the United Nations gender equality initiative "He For She" ["Mustafa Koç" (2016, January 24)].

Eczacıbaşı pioneered the Turkey branch of the World Business Council for Sustainable Development with the Turkish Association of Industry and Business, Turkey Business Council for Sustainable Development, and United Nations Global Compact Turkey [Eczacıbaşı Group Sustainability Report (2013, p. 35)]. In 2006, Eczacıbaşı became a signatory to the UN Global Compact and in 2007 became the first Turkish member of the World Business Council for Sustainable Development [Eczacıbaşı Corporate Brochure (2007), p. 12]. Since 2008, the Group has been reporting on its sustainability performance [Sustainability Report (2013)]. In 2011 the Group became a partner of the "Equal Opportunities Model" (FEM) project launched by the Women Entrepreneurs Association of Turkey with the support of the World Bank [Eczacıbaşı Corporate Brochure (2011, p. 46)] and holds a gender equality certificate from the association [Women Entrepreneurs Association of Turkey (2017)].

Garanti was the first Turkish bank to sign the UN Women's Empowerment Principles in 2014, developed four years earlier, in 2010, by a collaboration between the UN Global Compact and UN Women [Garanti Bank Annual Report (2016, p. 13)] and the first again to join in 2015 the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) Business Hub [Garanti Bank Annual Report (2016, p. 14)]. It was also the first and only company in Turkey [Garanti Bank Annual Report (2016, p. 97)] to be included in Bloomberg Financial Services Gender Equality Index launched in May 2016 [Bloomberg (2017)] and appeared to remain so in early 2018 [Bloomberg (2018)]. In 2012, Garanti Bank signed up the United

Nations Global Compact. In 2016, the company launched the Women Executives initiative aimed at increasing the rate of women serving in the bank's senior management [Garanti Bank Annual Report (2016, p. 90)]. Earlier, in 2006, the company had launched an initiative to support women entrepreneurs, focussing on four areas: providing finance to women entrepreneurs, encouraging them, training them, and helping them access new markets [Garanti Bank Sustainability Report (2016, p. 99)]. In 2010, the bank joined the Global Banking Alliance for Women, the largest network of banks offering service to small- and medium-sized business owner women, as the first and only member from Turkey [Garanti Annual Report (2016, p. 12)].

Our informants included the organizational development manager of Koç Holding; the human resources director, Corporate Human Resources, of Eczacıbaşı Holding Co.; and a manager of the human resource department of Garanti Bank, one of Turkey's largest banks. We have also interviewed the deputy general manager of a non-governmental organization that has been involved for over two decades in child protection initiatives and provides awareness training to businesses on gender discrimination, the Mother Child Education Foundation (Anne ÇocukEğitimVakfı, or AÇEV for short). Three of our informants were long-standing members of their respective organizations; the human resources director of Eczacıbaşı Holding Co. had 20 years' tenure with the group at the time of the interview; the organizational development manager of Koç Holding had 10 years' tenure with the group at the time of the interview, and the deputy general manager of the Mother Child Education Foundation had a 17-year association with the foundation. The manager of employer brand management from Garanti Bank had been with the company for a year-and-a-half at the time of the interview. Even though all but one of our informants gave us their permission to use their full names in our paper, we have decided to withhold all names and refer to all of our informants by their titles only. In the note at the end of this paper, the interview schedule may be found.

Given the track records of these companies in relation to women's issues, we decided to focus our study initially on the practices of these companies aimed at fostering gender equality in the workplace.

In the next section, we will review the evidence provided by these interviews.

4. Findings

In the following sections, we summarize our findings first under separate titles by each of the institutions whose managers we have interviewed. At the end of this section, a summary table is given of the gender-focussed practices of each of the three companies (Table 2).

4.1. Koç group

Koç Group is Turkey's largest industrial and services group [Koç Group (2016, p. 3)], with 69 companies [Koç Holding Web site (2018)], around 94,111 employees including overseas subsidiaries [Koç Group Annual Report (2017, p. 34)], and a total consolidated revenue of 98.9 billion TL in 2017 (or around USD 25 billion) [Koç

Group Annual Report (2017, p. 27)]. Koç Holding is the only Turkish company in the Fortune 500 [Koç Group Annual Report (2017, p. 13)]. In the 2017 listing, it was ranked as 463rd [Fortune (2017)]. Its combined revenues corresponded to 7% of Turkey's GDP in 2017 [Koç Group Annual Report (2017, p. 12)]. The group includes four of Turkey's five largest industrial enterprises, which are also four of Turkey's 10 largest exporters [Koç Group Annual Report (2017, p. 32)].

Koç became a signatory to the United Nations Global Compact in 2006, is a member of the World Business Council for Sustainable Development, and since 2007 the Group has been reporting on its sustainability performance [Koç Web site (2017)]. The holding company as well as several companies within the group are signatories of the Women's Empowerment Principles. According to a 2015 survey conducted by the business magazine *Capital* in collaboration with GfK Turkey, the Koç Holding topped the list of corporate social responsibility champions as ranked by businesspeople [Ayvaci (2015)] as well as a 2018 ranking by the public [GfK (2018)]. A 2016 survey revealed the Group as one of Turkey's top women-friendly business groups [Ayvaci (2016)]. In 2015, the Group became a partner in the UN He For She movement [Koc Annual Report (2015, p. 128)].

As the Group has adopted a gender-equality initiative for the period 2015–2017 [Koç Holding Annual Report (2016, p. 135)], one of the key informants we interviewed for this study was the organizational development manager of Koç Holding AŞ.

As of the end of 2016 women accounted for 27% of the entire workforce of the Group, including its overseas subsidiaries while they constituted 29% of middle and upper managerial ranks. How to improve the share of women employees in total employment appears to be “owned at the highest level of the organization.” Noting the level of women's labor participation ratio in Turkey, the manager added: “As a group, we believe that the greater a difference we can create, the higher will be its impact on [women's] employment in Turkey.” The manager acknowledged the difficulties surrounding the issue: “First of all, the number of women job applicants should increase.” One of the initiatives geared toward that end is bringing the number of women featured in recruitment advertising and product advertising equivalent to the number of men (interview note). “We are removing gender-related terminology from our advertising. In the visuals we try to feature men and women together, in equal representation. . . . We do not try to gather applications by using a poster featuring only male employees.” In fact, the company gave training workshops to all of the firms they worked with in corporate communications, marketing, and human resources. “In advertising we also pay attention to the underlying messages regarding the woman's place in society, the man's place in society, and with that perspective we try to [create] awareness.” The company also trained its managers to disregard the gender of the job applicant in their consideration and tested this on the human resources personnel (interview note). The aim, emphasized the manager, was not to engage in positive discrimination but to raise the awareness that women should not be discriminated against on arguments of the job's unsuitability for women.

The organizational development manager pointed out: “Simply increasing the number of job applications does not prepare the necessary conditions. At the same

time, . . . the physical conditions should be designed accordingly. You may think of for example dressing rooms that we use to meet physical requirements or you may think of ergonomically designing production lines to better suit women. . . .What is equally important for us at hiring is making sure that the women who join our organization are enabled to work and perform in appropriate conditions.”

As the group included a wide and disparate range of companies differing in industry and workforce gender composition, the type of work carried out on gender equality in each company could be different. The manager indicated that the companies within the group were at different “phases” of women’s employment. While some companies had a 99% male workforce, some others had a balanced gender composition but were losing women at the managerial levels. Thus, the challenges posed were different and had to be addressed case by case. For example, in 2016, at some of the manufacturing plants (Çayırova, Kocaeli, and Bursa plants), hundreds of women joined the workforce (interview note). Consequently, some production lines were redesigned to be more ergonomical for women. Dressing rooms and on-site lactation facilities were installed for women workers. Flextime is also a practice adopted by some of the companies within the Group, in which the industry allows such arrangements, and both men and women benefit from the arrangement (interview note).

As part of its commitment to the United Nations HeForShe campaign, the Group set up gender equality guidelines and implementation committees [Koc Annual Report (2015, p. 128)]. In collaboration with the Mother Child Education Foundation, a two-to-three-hour awareness training was given to 336 Koç Group members who in turn trained other employees. Part of the challenge was to eradicate prejudices against women in traditionally male-dominated jobs. “In order to become aware and reconsider such prejudices as ‘That is no woman’s job. It is a man’s job,’ [employees] took part in those training programs,” explained the organizational development manager of the Holding. Where no examples of women existed in jobs traditionally associated with men, such as some of the jobs in the automotive and energy industries, the company aims to create visible examples with which women can identify.

To tackle the issue of the “glass ceiling,” mentorship programs are used in developing women leaders. As part of succession planning, the ratio of women among the candidates for succession is monitored. “To have women in higher positions, we have to create women candidates and develop them. These are areas on which we are focusing.”

The manager was careful to point out that the gender-equality focussed practices were not gender-specific. “We are not saying ‘While women are mothers and have housework to do, let’s create flexible hours for them.’ . . .Men and women should be thought of together.” The Group companies are urged to make sure that the number of people to receive training is evenly split between men and women (interview note). The total number that received the awareness training exceeded 62 000 employees, and around 8,000 distributors were also given workshops to raise awareness of gender equality (interview note).

At the compensation arm of human resources management, pay equity exists throughout the Group, is determined according to the job and seniority, and as such it is regularly tracked (interview note).

The importance of Group-wide implementation of corporate policy was underlined in reference to the Group's above-mentioned "For My Country" initiative. "We are being successful really insofar as we are able to disseminate the general policy to the entire Group." To spread "best practices" wider through the Group, a contest was established: "The Most Successful Koç'ers". One of the categories, "Those Who Add Value to the Environment and to Society", receives entries on gender equality, where those practices are observed and evaluated, such as the automotive manufacturer Ford Otosan's "Honeybees are Becoming Engineers," aimed at increasing the rate of girls who choose engineering as a future profession [Ford Otosan Bal Arıları Web site (2017)] .

The end result of these endeavors was that within two years between 2015 and 2017 the number of women rose from 25% to 27% in the entire group (interview note). This was accomplished without reducing the number of male employees; while the number of employees within this period increased by 11%, the number of women employees increased by 16% (interview note). "Our companies are now devising their conditions, organizations, and development plans in order to be able to maintain this diversity."

Gender-equality initiatives have been mainly motivated by the company's leadership, according to the manager. "Especially the spokespersonship by Mr. Mustafa Koç for HeForShe had a great communication impact across the entire Group," she noted and explained that owning up of a topic drawing worldwide attention by top management could be said to be the "trigger." For years, the Group has been monitoring in every company the ratio of women in recruitment, existing employees, management, and turnover.

The resulting impact on innovation was noted. "From a human resources perspective, diversity needs to be encouraged because of its impact on innovation. We can also think of this from the perspective of sustainability," she added, stating that while gender was not the only dimension of innovation, it was one of them: "That is why, different views, different perspectives have to find themselves a place in the organization. ...A heterogeneous composition is one of the sources of innovation. ...The more we are able to produce good examples and the more we are at the forefront of this initiative, the greater will be its transformative power across our country." That principle appears to be reflected, for example, in the headline of a newspaper advertisement by Arçelik, the flagship of the Group: "With women we are more innovative than ever" [*Milliyet Sunday* (May 21, 2017, p. 10)]. The body copy explained that the company had risen to the 74th place in the World Intellectual Property Organization's top 100 filers of international patent applications — a result which the company claimed it greeted with happiness just as the rise in the number of women employees in its "Invention Team" by 34% in two years [*Milliyet Sunday* (May 21, 2017, p. 10)].

4.2. *Eczacıbaşı group*

One of the key informants we interviewed for this study was the human resources director/corporate human resources of Eczacıbaşı. Eczacıbaşı is one of Turkey's

biggest industrial groups with 42 companies [Eczacıbaşı Corporate Web site (2018)], around 13 300 employees (with around 9,500 of them employed in Turkey) (interview note), and a combined net revenue of 11.6 billion TL in 2017 (Corporate Web site 2017), or based around USD\$3.18 billion (on the average exchange rate for 2017 given by the Central Bank of The Republic of Turkey).

Eczacıbaşı pioneered the Turkey branch of the World Business Council for Sustainable Development with the Turkish Association of Industry and Business (TUSIAD), Turkey Business Council for Sustainable Development, and United Nations Global Compact Turkey [Eczacıbaşı Group Sustainability Report (2013, p. 35)]. In 2006, Eczacıbaşı became a signatory to the UN Global Compact. Since 2008, the Group has been reporting on its sustainability performance [Sustainability Report (2013)]. In 2011, Eczacıbaşı joined the first round of companies adopting the Equal Opportunities Model (FEM) developed by the Women Entrepreneurs Association of Turkey KAGIDER in collaboration with the World Bank, and that same year the Group launched a new recruitment policy that gives priority to women when deciding between candidates of equal strength [Eczacıbaşı Corporate Web Site (2017)]. In 2012 it passed its first Equal Opportunities Model (FEM) audit by PriceWaterhouseCoopers. In 2013, the Group joined the World Economic Forum “Equality at Work” platform under the auspices of Turkey’s Ministry of Family and Social Policies “to fight gender-based discrimination and reduce the economic participation and opportunity gender gap in the Turkish economy” [Eczacıbaşı Corporate Web Site (2017)]. That same year the company became a signatory to the United Nations’ “Women’s Empowerment Principles” [Eczacıbaşı Group Corporate Brochure (2012, p. 9)].

In a survey conducted by the business magazine *Capital* in collaboration with GfK Turkey businesspeople ranked the Eczacıbaşı Group third on the list of leaders of corporate social responsibility [Ayvaci (2015, p. 91)]. Furthermore, the Eczacıbaşı Group was ranked as one of Turkey’s most “women-friendly” business groups in a 2016 survey [Ayvaci (2016, p. 72)].

At the forefront of its corporate initiatives for inclusion, the group placed gender equality among its focus areas in 2011 (interview note) and announced that for its operations in Turkey, key performance indicators include raising the share of women recruited to professional positions every year “until women represent at least half of all annual recruits,” and to encourage more women to apply for positions traditionally assumed to be reserved for men [Eczacıbaşı Group Corporate Brochure (2013, p. 50)]. To achieve these objectives, action plans “with clear subheadings” were put in place (interview note).

In 2013 the Group adopted a policy of “flexible work schedules” [Eczacıbaşı Group Corporate Brochure (2012, p. 9)] to make it easier “for both men and women” to achieve work-life balance and expanded the policy in 2016 to include a weekly home office day for all employees (Eczacıbaşı Group Corporate Web Site, 2017). Also in 2013 a new training program was initiated for all Group members on “gender equality.” The Group engaged a consultancy company as it went about reviewing all of its structures and data (interview note).

In March of 2017 the company launched an equal opportunities program named “All for All,” aimed at reassessing “every business process and practice” in Group companies from recruitment to leadership training “with an eye to improving the Group’s equal opportunities performance” [Eczacıbaşı Corporate Web Site (2017)]. Referred to as the Group’s “equal opportunities brand,” All for All was introduced both inside and outside the Group. Of the Group’s 9,500 employees in Turkey white-collar women constituted around 35% (interview note). At hiring, white-collar women constituted 42%. (The statistics pertain to Turkey.) The project is aimed at raising the share of white-collar women at hiring to 50%, that in overall professional employment to 40%, and the share of women in managerial positions to 35% by the end of 2020 [Eczacıbaşı Corporate Web Site (2018a,b)]. In order to improve women’s representation in management, the company monitors three key performance indicators: percentage of white-collar women at hiring, percentage of women in the total number of white-collar employees, and percentage of women in management (interview note). A database was developed that allows for tracking these numbers at more disaggregated levels (such as the percentage of women in talent pools) so as to formulate action plans (interview note).

Action plans launched in July of 2017 incorporated “women development programs” [Eczacıbaşı Group Sustainability Report (2017, p. 29)], focussing on career coaching and empowerment, including women mentorship programs. To remove gender bias from all of the human resource procedures, starting from hiring, the company is developing a training focussed on “unbiased behavior” (interview note).

As part of this approach, the company introduced in January 2018 [Sözer (2018, p. 6)] “gender-blind CVs”, whereby until the interviewing stage in the recruitment process, the managers have no clues to the gender identity of the job applicant. Explained the HR Director: “While the information [on gender, marital status, military duty requirements] enters our database, the managers do not have information that will reveal the gender of the applicant as the application moves through the regular process. . . . Thereby, the prejudice that may form in initial screenings will be eliminated. Of course, you will be informed of the gender of the person coming in front of you for the interview, and at that stage we will be training our managers with awareness workshops as much as possible so as to make a gender-independent decision when choosing the final candidate. But, we will make sure that gender does not become a screening out factor in the first steps [of the application process].”

Also, communication campaigns were developed “aimed at breaking down unconscious gender biases” [All For All (2017)]. The director indicated that some of their communication campaigns were very well received and “are a very important reflection of the Eczacıbaşı Group’s faith in women and the import it gives to the place of women in life.” For recruitment, two main focus areas are sales and technical positions (interview note), where efforts are undertaken to increase both the pool of women applying for sales and technical positions and the number of women recruited for these positions [All For All (2017)].

Equal-pay has been in force for a long time, informed the human resources director with a 20-year tenure at the company, emphasizing that salaries are determined systematically by criteria completely independent of gender. Career paths are

transparent, and employees in technical operations, support cadres, and specialization-management cadres are able to see where they are at present in their career “maps” and the steps they need to take to advance further (interview note). Retention-aimed diversity initiatives include also on-site lactation facilities.

The thrust of these activities was “encouraging women to own up their careers, to empower them, and if they harbor any doubts about promotion due to their being a woman, to raise their awareness so as to relieve those doubts,” informed the human resources director.

The main impetus behind the gender-equality initiative, in the director’s view, came from the Group’s leadership. Women’s representation is one of the criteria in the scorecards used to appraise upper management’s performance; whereby management is held accountable for progress in this area. While the overarching motive may be formulation of policies in line with the company’s “tradition of respect for the individual,” one company director (notably, another corporate director — the innovation and sustainability coordinator) indicated in an interview to the blog of a recruitment site that “At the Eczacıbaşı Group, we believe we can be one only if we do not discriminate between men and women and that we can reach our targets only if we run towards them together” [Kariyer.net (2017)], thus underlining the importance of gender equality in organizational performance.

Even though our informant stated that the Group has a culture that has always valued inclusiveness and pointed out the difficulty of disintegrating the impact of gender-equality related corporate initiatives on business performance from among the many different factors at play, he also noted that some of the companies within the Eczacıbaşı Group increased the percentage of white-collar women at hiring from 25% to 50% compared to five years ago, and Group-wide from 40% to 44% again during the same period (while the percentage was around 42% in 2017). Referring to the Group initiative of supporting and empowering women, he added: “It is not possible for us to see the results of this immediately within one year but we believe that in this structure we will be able to increase the percentage of women in management. We truly believe this.”

4.3. *Garanti Bank*

Garanti is Turkey’s second largest private bank with consolidated assets of US\$94.4 billion as of December 31, 2017 [Garanti Bank Annual Report (2017, p. 26)]. The company operates in every segment of the banking sector, has more than 15 million customers, and around 19 000 employees [Garanti Bank Annual Report (2017, p. 26)]. The bank originally belonged to the Turkish business group Doğuş; General Electric became a shareholder in the early 2000s, and in 2011 GE shares were sold to the Spanish banking group BBVA, which subsequently increased its ownership so that today it is the main shareholder with 49.85% shares while Doğuş Group holds 0.05% and the remaining shares are publicly held [Garanti Bank Annual Report (2017, p. 26)].

As the first Turkish bank to sign the UN Women’s Empowerment Principles in 2014 [Garanti Annual Report (2016, p. 13)], and the first again to join in 2015 the

UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) Business Hub [Garanti Annual Report (2016, p. 14)], as well as being a signatory to the UN Global Compact among other initiatives, Garanti Bank warranted closer investigation into its policies regarding women employees. Also to be noted is that the company was ranked as third in a study of Turkey's top "women-employee friendly" companies in 2015 and as seventh concerning the first 100 "women-executive friendly" companies [Ayvaci (2016)]. As of March 2017, the share of women in the total staff was 57%, women in decision-making positions comprised 40%, and in managerial ranks including the positions of manager and branch manager, women accounted for 30% of the entire workforce (interview note). The bank is collaborating with the United Nations to raise the share of women in the total staff even higher than its current level of 57%, and promotions are always made with an eye to gender equality (interview note).

The company's women-related initiatives are carried out under three different headings. Social responsibility projects include financial literacy training. Employee-related projects include women's empowerment initiatives. For example, the bank collaborates with the Ministry of Family and Social Security on an equal opportunities (gender equality) project. Another new project is women's leadership (interview note). The third heading under which women-related initiatives are grouped is client-related projects such as the project targeting women entrepreneurs as mentioned earlier in this paper.

The company has a Gender Equality Committee which includes employees from all levels of the corporate hierarchy, allowing demands from various levels to be heard. "Parent-Child Academy," a platform which offers parents seminars on child development several times during the year, is one of the projects overseen by the Gender Equality Committee. A training program devised in collaboration with UN Women investigates where the bottleneck areas are that prevent women from rising higher in the company.

The company appears to approach women's issues from a wide perspective and is one of the pilot companies participating in a Sabancı University project called "Business Against Domestic Violence" (interview note). Garanti prepared guidelines for managers to follow in case of encountering victims of domestic violence. A 24 h hotline for victims of domestic violence was launched. The hotline is operated by specialized psychologists, and callers may receive legal counsel if desired (interview note). In an effort to combat the trend of women's leaving employment after giving birth, the bank designed a pre-natal and post-natal program for its employees called "Motherhood Experience," which encompasses an "on-boarding" module for new mothers returning to work after giving birth. As part of the program, managers are also trained in order to effectively oversee the process of pregnant employees' transition to motherhood and return to work (interview note). It is important to note that the bank prepared the program (not yet launched at the time of the interview) even though only about 3% of women employees quit after giving birth (interview note). Today, the program is in force [Garanti Bank Corporate Web Site (2017)].

To increase the percentage of women in the company, Garanti is collaborating with UN Women, whereby the bank has prepared an eight-module training program

aimed at raising awareness about possible differences between men and women in such areas as stress management, leadership qualities, or time management. The program is being piloted since March 2017 (interview note).

The results of these women-related initiatives are most apparent, according to the manager, in greater employee satisfaction and the bank's growing reputation outside "as an institution that champions such issues" (interview note).

Garanti's interest in women's issues is not new. The bank's collaboration with the Women Entrepreneurs Association, for example, dates back a decade (interview note). "We are a company that believes in gender equality," emphasized the manager of the department of employee brand management. The bank's top management supports these policies (interview note).

4.4. The NGO perspective: Mother child education foundation (AÇEV)

Established in 1993 with the express aim of developing and implementing early childhood and adult education programs for children and their families, the Mother Child Education Foundation (AÇEV) launched in 2009 the "Multidimensional Women's Empowerment Project," funded by the Sabancı Foundation Grant Programs [Mother Child Education Foundation Annual Report (2015, p. 6)]. In 2011, it became a member of the UNESCO/NGO Collective Consultation on Equal Education for All [Mother Child Education Foundation Annual Report (2015, p. 6)]. The same year the association received a project from UN Women on preventing domestic violence and achieving gender equality (interview note).

At that time, the association redesigned the entirety of its programs in order to accommodate the perspectives of gender equality, respect for human dignity and differences and peace, child protection against neglect and exploitation, and prevention of domestic violence (interview note). In 2015, the Mother Child Education Foundation became one of the partners in Koç Holding's "I Support Gender Equality For My Country" project [Mother Child Education Foundation Annual Report (2015, p. 7)], and the association developed an awareness training project called "Information Mill Seminars" [Mother Child Education Foundation Annual Report (2015, p. 28)]. In the first stage of the project, 336 people from Koç were trained, who subsequently trained other Koç employees (interview note). The association also held workshops in 2015 on masculinity and violence against women with the Turkish Armed Forces in response to a request from the Turkey Office of the United Nations Population Fund and gave training to Isuzu to raise awareness on gender equality [Mother Child Education Fund (2015, p. 28)]. Also included as part of the association's 2017 agenda was a three-day training program for the suppliers of Ford Otosan (interview note).

Drawing on his experience with a variety of organizations on developing gender-equality initiatives, the association's deputy general manager pointed to the role of corporate leadership in the success of such initiatives. "If the holding company shows commitment that is very effective," he stated.

Below we present a summary table of the gender-equality focussed initiatives of the three companies that we have studied (Table 2).

Table 2. Women-related corporate initiatives.

	Koç Holding	Eczacıbaşı Holding	Garanti Bank
UN Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs)	√ Koç Holding signed in 2015 (1), 30 Group companies signed in 2017 (2a)	√ in 2013 (5)	√ in 2014 (9)
Supporter of UN gender equality initiative "He For She"	√ in 2015 (2a)	√ in 2015 (6a)	√ in 2015 (9)
Women Executives initiative (mentoring, awareness training among team members with a managerial position)	√ in 2017 (2a)	√ in 2017 (7)	√ in 2016 (10)
Mentoring	√ (interview note)	√ (8)	√ (11)
Gender Equality Training Programs (to increase awareness)	√ (2a)	√ (6b)	√ (11)
Gender sensitivity in marketing and marketing communications	√ (2a)	√ (6b)	√ (11)
Gender Equality in Recruitment	√ (2b)	√ (6b)	√ (11)
Gender-Neutral Compensation System	√ (2b)	√ (8)	√ (11)
UN Global Compact Membership	√ in 2006 (2c)	√ in 2006 (6c)	√ in 2012 (12)
Membership in World Business Council for Sustainable Development	√ in 2011 (3)	√ in 2007 (6c)	√ in 2012 (9)
Indication of commitment as embodied by a corporate manifesto, corporate credo, a corporate statement of principles or other indicators of top management support	√ (4)	√ (6b)	√ (11)
Accommodating special needs of women employees (i.e. dressing rooms, breast-feeding rooms, flexible time, etc.)	√ (interview note)	√ (interview note)	√ (13)

Sources: The above table was compiled using a number of sources: (1) Koç Holding 2016 Annual Report, p. 134; (2a) Koç Holding 2017 Annual Report, p. 102; (2b) Koç Holding 2017 Annual Report, p. 117; (2c) Koç Holding 2017 Annual Report, p. 120; (3) Interview note with Business Council for Sustainable Development Turkey on 20 April 2018; (4) UN Global Compact Communication on Progress of Koç Group, 2016, p. 12; (5) Global Compact Network Türkiye, p. 16; (6a, b, c) Eczacıbaşı Web Site (2018); (7) Eczacıbaşı Group Profile 2016, p. 8; (1) UN Global Compact Communication on Progress of Eczacıbaşı, 2016; (9) Garanti Bank Sustainability Report 2016, p. 49; (10) Garanti Bank Annual Report 2017, p. 92; (11) UN Global Compact Communication on Progress of Garanti Bank, 2017 [United Nations Global Compact (2017)]; (12) Garanti Bank Annual Report 2016, p. 12; (13) Garanti Bank Official Site (2018).

Some patterns emerge from the data. All three companies not only fulfill but also surpass legal standards. While it may be expected (according to institutional theory) that as large firms, they are most visible to the state, media, and professional groups and may therefore feel themselves under greater pressure to conform to societal expectations, the fact that they go above and beyond those expectations, in some cases launching a corporate crusade for gender diversity, is interesting and needs to be noted. Furthermore, they embrace gender equality initiatives as part of their strategic plans and implement those initiatives systematically, under the guidance of outside consultants. Although the individual programs adopted may differ in content, all three companies subscribe to international principles of gender equality and make their commitment manifest through corporate credos or corporate statements.

Based on the evidence presented earlier, we conclude that both of our propositions are supported: Companies with visible leadership commitment to gender equality are more likely to adopt gender equality initiatives. It is also more likely for diversity management initiatives to be adopted by companies where leaders hold positive beliefs about the productivity, innovation, public relations, and morale implications of a more diverse workforce.

5. Conclusion and Discussion

The objective of this study was to explore what type of gender diversity initiatives were undertaken by Turkey's most women-friendly companies, the main motives behind those initiatives, and what results, if any, such initiatives yielded. It adds to previous literature by chronicling gender diversity initiatives in an emerging market. This work contributes to the literature on the relationship between leadership and diversity initiatives by highlighting the role of leadership commitment to gender diversity and belief in its organizational benefits. Our study has several managerial and policy implications as well as limitations which point to further avenues of research. These will be discussed below:

5.1. *Managerial and policy implications*

The interview evidence suggests that the companies studied demonstrate some of the best practices outlined in the literature on diversity management. Gender equality is treated by these companies as part of their strategic plan, it has top leadership commitment, and a set of quantitative measures is put in place to evaluate the impact of the program. Noteworthy is the fact that these companies go above and beyond legal standards, and this may partly be a response to international pressures since international agencies have increasingly focussed on workforce gender equality. Both the two business groups and the bank have been internationally expanding for many years, and their zealous embracing of gender diversity may in part be a response to the normative pressures brought to bear on them by international stakeholders such as international agencies or the companies' international partners.

A 2016 survey of large businesses in Turkey revealed that women were well-represented in large companies [McKinsey and Company (2017)]. The same survey also found that women were well represented in banks. In Turkey, banking has

traditionally been one of the industries with a relatively high ratio of women [e.g. Özkanlı and Alp (2000), as cited in Özkanlı (2001)]. Even so, the companies in our sample were bent on closely monitoring women's representation as well as improving the status of their women employees.

The importance of top management's embracing gender equality is an undercurrent running through the entire interview evidence. The fact that at Koç Holding the late Chairperson Mr. Mustafa Koç was a He For She spokesperson was pointed to as an important impetus behind the Group's gender equality initiatives. Eczacıbaşı Holding again pointed to leadership's role in its programs directed toward gender equality. It is also worth noting that one of Garanti Bank's former CEOs, Akın Öngör, in his 2010 memoirs on his time of leadership at Garanti, mentioned "no gender discrimination" as one of the pillars of the essence and culture of the bank [2012, p. 282]. As the body of research on gender diversity referred to in the literature review of this paper suggests, realization of the full benefits of diversity may hinge upon the organizational culture. This study has also found evidence of strong leadership behind gender diversity initiatives, and this points to the importance of corporate leadership as one of the main influences on organizational culture in the initiation, implementation, and maintenance of those initiatives.

Not only may diversity initiatives be at different stages in different countries, but even across the same business group within the same country diversity initiatives may be at differing stages due to industry differences. Our interview evidence suggests that a top-down approach is necessary in spreading women-friendly business practices, but the circumstances surrounding each company also need to be taken into account. For business groups, diffusion of such policies appears to be facilitated by the organizational structure; this points to the importance of the social role that may be played by business groups in the emerging-country context where they are especially prevalent [see, for example, Colpan and Jones (2016)].

The strength of commitment to gender equality of these companies may be evinced by such actions as: corporate leaders' expressly supporting highly publicized initiatives; setting recruitment targets; using disaggregated data that allows management to pinpoint the causes of gender imbalances; adopting practices that improve work-life balance; and spreading diversity initiatives along the supply chain.

While enlightened leadership may account for the nature and extent of the initiatives discussed here, the importance of supra-national bodies as well as national governments should not be overlooked in diverting attention to gender equality through such programs as HeForShe by the United Nations Development Program.

The type and content of the initiatives evince strong kinship. Growing similarities are particularly observable among large firms in emerging markets because they are using human-resource management practices developed in more advanced human-resource management contexts, as noted by Rupidara and Darby (2017). Furthermore, normative institutional pressures such as consulting firms may also contribute to the dissemination of standardized knowledge and processes regarding gender equality initiatives. Consideration and development of gender equality focussed HRM practices that also address country-specific issues may overcome some of the limitations of the former.

Thus, our evidence suggests that the adoption of business practices aimed at fostering gender equality results from the triple pressures of the external environment (for example, in the form of government laws and regulations), non-profit organizations, and corporate leaders, similar to the findings of Vidal *et al.* [2010] in the case of green practices.

The prevalence of awareness training initiatives suggests that gender equality at work is an issue that still needs to be developed further. In contrast, it is noteworthy that pay equity in some of the largest companies in Turkey is a long-settled matter that is no longer an issue, at least from the management's perspective. The results of these initiatives in terms of various measures of business performance appear to be difficult to gauge at present, but in time their impact may become clearer.

The motivation behind corporate gender-equality initiatives appears to be both guided by notions of fairness and the recognition that attracting and retaining the best talent necessitates such moves. The fact that some of these programs are placed under the "employer brand management" department within human resources at one of our companies or internal branding of gender-equality initiatives suggests that employers recognize the impact of gender-equality policies on their image as an employer.

Innovation appears to be one of the reasons for and expected outcomes of gender-equality initiatives. Innovation is considered to be especially important for emerging-market companies in order to be able to compete internationally against their long-established rivals from developed economies. In fact, some emerging-market companies have challenged the supremacy of developed countries in innovation as indicated by the increasing ratio of emerging-market companies in innovative company rankings [e.g. Sara and Jackson (2010)]. This study has found some evidence that businesses consider workplace gender diversity as one of the factors driving innovation.

Gaining access to and maintaining critical resources that will provide the firm with sustainable competitive advantage is recognized and acknowledged by these companies, and the leadership plays a prominent role in introducing and disseminating gender-equality initiatives. At the same time, it should also be kept in mind that the two business groups in our sample as well as the bank have a long history of social involvement, spearheaded by corporate leaders. The two business groups are especially visible with their diversified concerns in many different industries and can be observed to be at the forefront of a wide variety of sustainability issues such as the environment and sponsorship of the arts [Gülsoy and Evcil (2015)]. One scholar noted, for example, that Nejat Eczacıbaşı, the founder of the eponymous group of companies, "emphasized the importance of public activities that businessmen had to undertake both to promote the respectability of business activity and to consolidate a certain business ethic among the entrepreneurs" [Buğra (1994, p. 89)]. Researchers have also noted the pioneering role in corporate social responsibility that the founder of the Koç Group of Companies, Mr. Vehbi Koç, played by establishing an eponymous foundation in the 1960s [Alakavuklar *et al.* (2009, p. 119)]. The treatment of gender equality by these businesses appears to be another manifestation of that tradition.

This study offers further evidence that gender-based diversity initiatives offer business benefits. Notwithstanding the merits of this conclusion, it is also worth noting that the so-called “business case for gender diversity” has its critics [please see, for example, Cassell (2006) for an outline of the critiques]. Ultimately, the question remains: If there were no business imperative, would it still not be necessary to have gender diversity in the workplace on equal-opportunity grounds? That line of thought leads to a role for vigilance on the part of the law maker. The companies studied here are held up as exemplary by various surveys (as mentioned in the sections mentioned earlier). Furthermore, they are among Turkey’s leading businesses. Large companies come under public scrutiny more easily and that knowledge may be guiding their behavior, where small- and medium-sized businesses are concerned, attention and leadership by state agencies in developing programs that take into account the smaller resources of SMEs may be especially needed.

5.2. *Limitations and research implications*

This study has several limitations. For one, it is a qualitative study, and therefore its findings have limited generalizability. Furthermore, it deals with only one country. Quantitative as well as qualitative studies focussing on several countries would help further our understanding of the nature and success factors of corporate policies aimed at improving the attraction and retention rates of women employees in general and of women managers in particular. The preliminary evidence that these companies have of their initiatives suggests that the programs are succeeding in attracting and retaining a higher percentage of women; however, longitudinal data and a larger sample are needed to reach more definite conclusions. Furthermore, rank-and-file employees may hold different opinions from management regarding the effectiveness of these initiatives. Studies that incorporate the views of employees from all levels of the corporate hierarchy would enrich our understanding of the extent to which these initiatives are succeeding. Additionally, industry-level analyses may provide different perspectives, as is suggested by the case of the business group that contains different companies operating in different industries.

Finally, the study sample included two of Turkey’s largest business groups and one of the country’s largest banks. These companies are among Turkey’s most admired employers; and as such they attract every year large numbers of applicants. In fact, our interview evidence (not reported above) indicated that for at least two of these companies the proportion of male and female applicants was comparable. Studies focussing on small- and medium-sized enterprises which have to contend with smaller resources and do not have the same appeal for job seekers may also yield fruitful insights on how gender equality in the workplace can be improved.

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Appendix A. Interview Schedule

Interview with Human Resources Director of Eczacıbaşı Holding Co. conducted on March 31, 2017.

Interview with the Organizational Development Manager of Koç Holding Co. conducted on April 17, 2017.

Interview with Employer Brand Manager of the Human Resources Department of Garanti Bank, conducted on April 18, 2017.

Interview with Deputy General Manager of Mother Child Education Foundation AÇEV, conducted on May 5, 2017.

Biography

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