

**INVESTIGATING FEMALE MIDDLE MANAGER
CAREER PROGRESS IN MALAYSIA PUBLIC
LISTED COMPANIES**

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LISTED COMPANIES**

by

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LIST OF SYMBOLS

A	Cronbach Alpha
R^2	Coefficients of Determination
f^2	Effect Size
Q^2	Predictive Relevance
B	Standardised Beta
D	Omission Distance

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AVE	Average Variance Extracted
CB-SEM	Covariance-based SEM
CI	Confidence Interval
CMV	Common Method Variance
CR	Composite Reliability
CVC	Cross-Validated Communalities
CVR	Cross-Validated Redundancy
ET	Employers' Trust towards Female Employee
FLPR	Female Labour Force Participation Rate
WCP	Women Career Progression
HRM	Human Resource Management
HTMT	Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio
LL	Lower Limit
LMX	Leader-member Exchange
LV	Latent Variable
MO	Motherhood
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OP	Organisational Practices
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
PLC	Public Listed Company
PLS	Partial Least Squared
PLS-SEM	Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling
SEM	Structural Equation Modeling
SGX	Singapore Exchange
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
UL	Upper Limit
USM	Universiti Sains Malaysia
VIF	Variation Inflation Factor

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**PENYIASATAN PERKEMBANGAN KERJAYA PENGURUS
PERTENGAHAN WANITA DALAM SYARIKAT- SYARIKAT TERSENARAI
BURSA MALAYSIA**

ABSTRAK

Kegagalan relatif dikalangan wanita, untuk mencapai kedudukan jawatan teratas dalam pengurusan, adalah topik penting yang menjadi perhatian. Penyertaan wanita sebagai tenaga kerja bukan hanya isu wanita semata-mata, malah berkait rapat dengan pertumbuhan organisasi dan ekonomi yang mampan. Mengkaji dan memahami halangan sedia wujud, akan membantu wanita dalam jawatan pengurusan pertengahan untuk mencapai jawatan pengurusan atasan. Oleh itu, kajian ini mengkaji sama ada pembolehubah tidak bersandar seperti amalan organisasi, ibu yang bekerja di dalam organisasi, serta konflik pekerjaan dan kehidupan, membentuk perkembangan kerjaya wanita. Di samping itu, kepercayaan majikan terhadap kakitangan wanita dikaji sebagai moderator antara pembolehubah tidak bersandar dan perkembangan kerjaya wanita. Satu model konseptual telah dibangunkan untuk mengkaji halangan perkembangan kerjaya wanita di syarikat-syarikat yang tersenarai dalam Bursa Malaysia. Dalam kajian ini, data diperolehi daripada 250 wanita dalam jawatan pengurusan pertengahan syarikat-syarikat tersenarai Bursa Malaysia. Kajian telah dikendalikan melalui kaedah mengedarkan/mengumpul borang soal selidik, serta soal selidik dalam talian melalui e-mel (dari Mac 2018 sehingga September 2018). *Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS)* dan *Partial Least Squared Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM)* digunakan untuk menganalisis data. Berdasarkan analisis data yang dikumpulkan, terdapat hubungan positif yang signifikan antara amalan organisasi dan perkembangan kerjaya wanita. Tambahan pula, hubungan

positif antara amalan organisasi dan perkembangan kerjaya wanita dimoderasikan oleh kepercayaan majikan terhadap kakitangan wanita, dimana tahap kepercayaan majikan yang rendah memberikan hubungan positif antara amalan organisasi dan perkembangan kerjaya wanita. Walau bagaimanapun, hubungan antara ibu yang bekerja di dalam organisasi, konflik pekerjaan dan kehidupan; dengan perkembangan kerjaya wanita adalah tidak signifikan. Di samping itu, kepercayaan majikan terhadap kakitangan wanita menunjukkan kesan moderasi tidak signifikan antara hubungan yang dinyatakan di atas. Adalah dicadangkan majikan dan kakitangan dapat bekerjasama bagi mewujudkan persekitaran kerja yang lebih baik dan memastikan bahawa wanita diperlakukan secara adil di tempat kerja.

INVESTIGATING FEMALE MIDDLE MANAGER CAREER PROGRESS IN MALAYSIA PUBLIC LISTED COMPANIES

ABSTRACT

The relative failure of women to move into top rank positions in management is an essential topic of concern. Women participation in the work force is not only a women issue but is also about sustainable growth of organisations and the economy. By studying and understanding existing barriers, women in middle management positions can be assisted to obtain top management positions. Thus, the present study has examined to what extent do independent variables such as organisational practices, motherhood and work-life conflict respectively, contribute to women career progression. In addition, employers' trust towards female employees has been studied as a moderator between the independent variables and women career progression. A conceptual framework was developed to examine women career progression barriers in Malaysia Public Listed Companies (PLCs). In this study, questionnaire survey data were collected from 250 women in middle management positions attached to PLCs. The survey was conducted via drop-off/pick-up method, as well as online questionnaire through email (from March 2018 to September 2018). Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and the Partial Least Squared Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) methods were used to analyse the data. Based on the analyses of the data collected, there is a significant positive relationship between organisational practices and women career progression. Furthermore, the positive relationship between organisational practices and women career progression is moderated by the employers' trust towards female employees, such that low level of employers' trust towards female employees presents a strong positive relationship between

organisational practices and women career progression. There are however insignificant relationship between motherhood and work-life conflict respectively, on women career progression. Additionally, employers' trust towards female employees indicated insignificant moderating effect between the relationships mentioned above. It is thus suggested that employers and employees work together towards a better working environment to ensure that women are being treated fairly in the workplace.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The first section of this research gives an introduction of women labour force participation in the workplace. Subsequently, this is followed with looking into women under-representation in top management positions and how this group in top management impact the economy and organisations as a whole. The following sections look into the problem statement, research questions and objectives, theoretical and practical significance of this research as well as definitions of key terms. Finally, this chapter ends with a summary and organisation of the remaining chapters.

1.2 Background of the Study

Gender equality in the workplace is attained when people can enjoy and access the same opportunities, resources and rewards regardless of gender. Significant progress towards workplace gender equality has been made in recent decades, especially in female labour force participation and education. Nevertheless, gender gap in the workforce is still prevalent. As demonstrated by The World Bank (2017), the female working-age population is listed as 2.4 billion, compared to males at 2.5 billion in 2016. Although women make up half of the global working-age (in ages 15 to 64) population in the world, women continue to be under-represented in the labour market (International Labour Organization & Gallup, 2017). The International Labour Organization and Gallup (2017) added that gender equality is still far from achievable in 2016, and findings revealed that real divides still exist in many global regions. Women participation in the workplace plays an important role in organisations, and

for economically sustainable development; and is not just about women issues alone. Advancing women employment status globally has a powerful ripple effect, benefiting workplaces, families, economies, communities and societies as a whole (Catalyst, 2014). In addition, the World Economic Forum (2017) has further strengthened that appropriate utilisation of half of the worldwide total talent pool and ensuring its healthy development, has a tremendous significance on the competitiveness, future readiness, and growth of economy and businesses around the world.

Based on Table 1.1, the data as of 2016 shows overall female labour force participation rate (FLPR) was only 49.4 per cent while male accounted for 76.1 per cent in 2017, and was expected to remain constant in 2018 (International Labour Organization, 2017a). Emerging countries led with the most substantial gender participation gap rate at 30.6 per cent, with the second largest occurring in developed countries at 16.1 per cent, and thirdly in developing countries at 12.3 per cent (International Labour Organization, 2017a).

Table 1.1 Labour Force Participation Rate by Gender, 2017

Country and Region	Male	Female	Gap
World	76.1	49.4	26.7
Developing countries	82.6	70.3	12.3
Emerging countries	77.5	46.9	30.6
Developed countries	68.0	51.9	16.1
Northern Africa	74.1	22.9	51.2
Latin America and the Caribbean	78.3	52.7	25.6
Northern America	68.3	56.2	12.1
South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific	81.2	58.8	22.4
Eastern Europe	68.1	53.0	15.1

Source: Percentages for 2017 are projections based on ILO's Trends Econometric Models, November 2016, in International Labour Organization, 2017a

Most of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries had experienced a considerable rise in female labour force participation. Based on Figure 1.1 on page 4, a comparison between 2010 and 2016 indicates most of the OECD countries showed slow but steady progress of FLPR. Over the years, females participation rates in Italy, Ireland, United Kingdom (UK), Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Korea, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada had increased by 4.1 per cent, 1.8 per cent, 2.9 per cent, 2.8 per cent, 1.2 per cent, 4.0 per cent, 3.9 per cent, 5.0 per cent, 1.6 per cent, 3.3 per cent, 0.2 per cent respectively. However, the United States of America (USA) decreased by 1.1 per cent (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2017). In the United States (US), the lack of policies to support work-family flexibility and traditional roles are still preventing many women from entering the labour force (Krause & Sawhill, 2017).

The aforementioned is in agreement with Blau and Kahn (2013), where the lack of family-friendly policies in America has accounted for nearly 30 per cent reduction in women participation between 1990 and 2010 compared to other OECD countries. McKinsey & Company (2017a) further supports that in 2016, a research conducted on 222 companies across corporate America, showed the under-representation of women employees persists at each level, although they earned more college degrees compared to their men's counterpart for thirty years and counting.

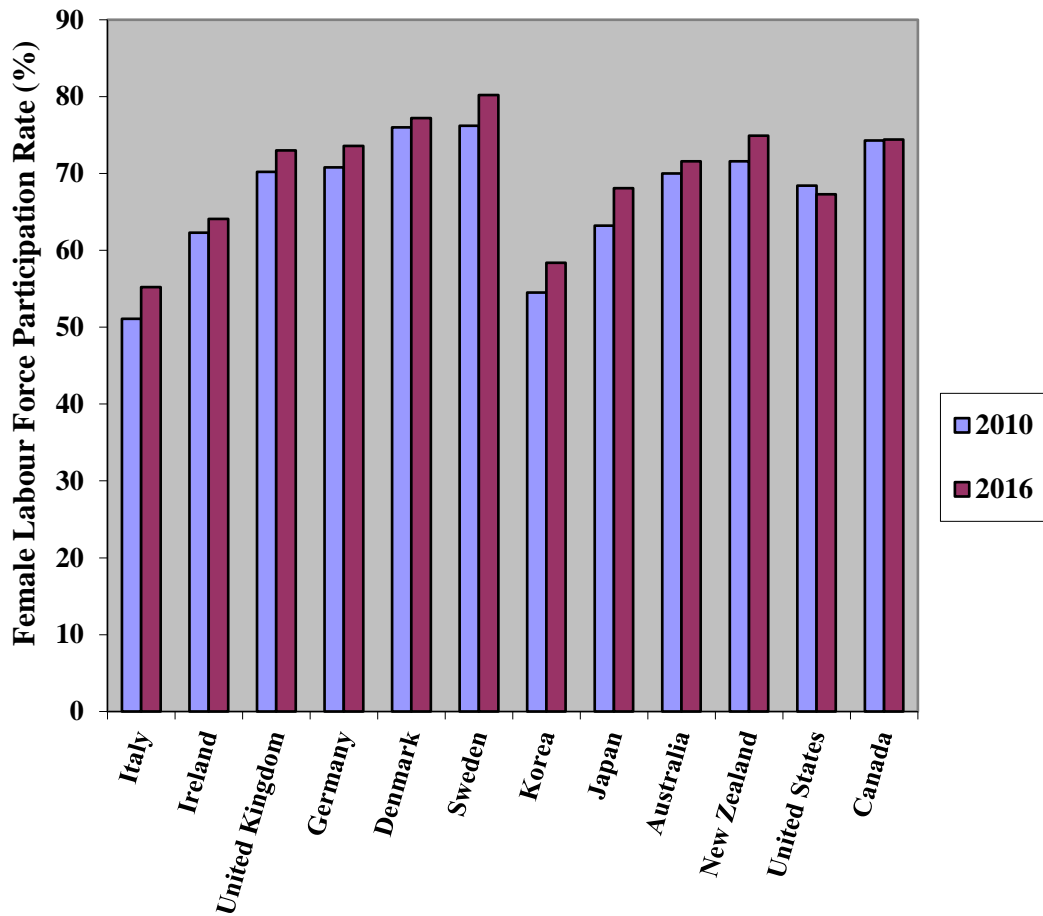


Figure 1.1 Female Labour Force Participation Rate of Some OECD Countries (Comparison between 2010 and 2016)

Source: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2017, Labour Force Statistics by Sex and Age-Indicators, Female Labour Force Participation Rate.

As demonstrated in Figure 1.2 on the ensuing page, an increase in FLPR in Italy, Ireland, the UK, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Korea, Japan, Australia and New Zealand has resulted in a reduction in the gap between male and female labour force participation by 2.4 per cent, 1.5 per cent, 2.0 per cent, 3.0 per cent, 1.2 per cent, 1.9 per cent, 2.1 per cent, 4.4 per cent, 2.2 per cent, 1.9 per cent respectively between 2010 and 2016 (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2017). The gender gap in labour force participation rates has decreased significantly. In contrast, both the US and Canada records slight increases each in the gender gap by 0.3 per cent (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2017). It is

clear that there is substantial variation in the differences of labour force participation rate, according to gender.

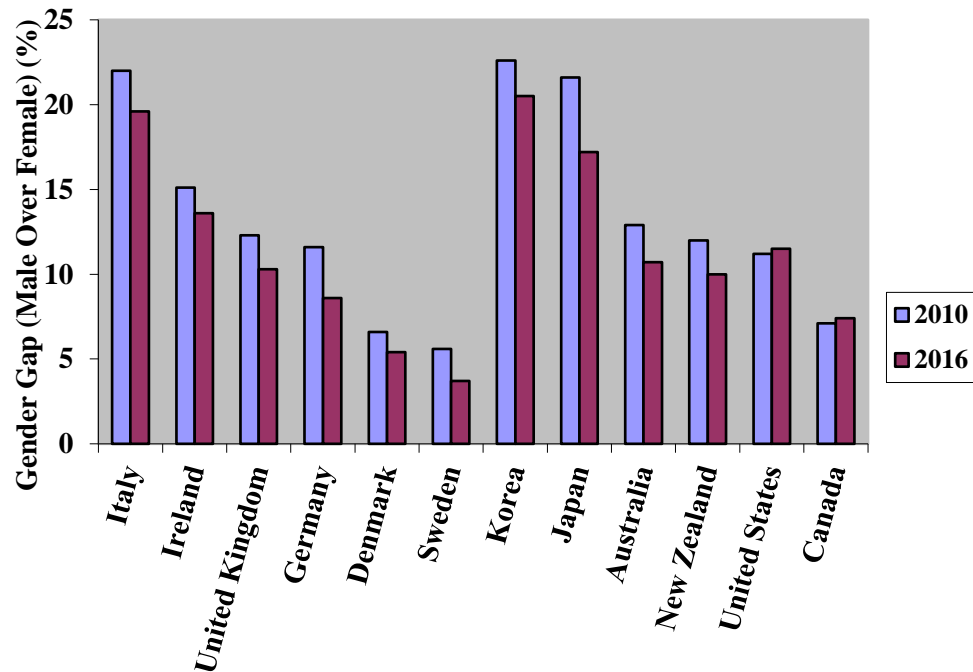


Figure 1.2 Gender Disparities in Labour Force Participation Rate in OECD Countries (Comparison between 2010 and 2016)

Source: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2017, Labour Force Statistics by Sex and Age-Indicators, Female Labour Force Participation Rate.

O'Neil, Hopkins, and Bilimoria (2008) contended that, while more women participated in management roles in today's organisations, misleading assumptions surrounding women in leadership positions has not changed much throughout the years. Women have been receiving good education and hence qualify to be on par with their men counterpart. But the negative perception that women are powerless, and cannot be on par with men will not end shortly. Women appear severely under-represented in senior management positions, and in public roles as well (UN Women, 2015).

Table 1.2 Women Representation in Senior Management

Year	Percentage of businesses with at least one woman in senior management	Proportion of senior roles held by females
2015	68%	22%
2016	67%	24%
2017	66%	25%
2018	75%	24%

Source: Grant Thornton (2018)

According to Grant Thornton (2017a), the global percentage of women in senior management teams has just increased by a mere 1 per cent from 24 per cent in 2016 to 25 per cent in 2017. That contributed to a 6 per cent increment from 2004, but the number of organisations with no woman participation at the senior level has increased from 33 per cent in 2016 to 34 per cent in 2017. Referring to critical global findings of Grant Thornton (2018) in Table 1.2 above, the percentage of businesses with at least one woman in senior management was 66 per cent in 2017, which increased significantly to 75 per cent in 2018. Nevertheless, the proportion of senior positions held by women which was 25 per cent in 2017 marginally decreased to 24 per cent in 2018. These portrayed that women face barriers in career progression to obtain top management positions. Tarr-Whelan (2009) indicated that the career progression pace of women professionals and managers to be continuously unequal and slow across numerous cultures and countries.

In support of earlier fact on this phenomenon, Deloitte (2017) compiled data of women in top management from nearly 7,000 firms in 44 countries in Europe, the Americas, the Asia Pacific and the Middle East. In the stated research, Deloitte (2017) discovered women held 15 per cent of board seats in 2016, an increase of 3 per cent from 2015. The report added that Norway is the first country which took the lead of

40 per cent gender quota for both men and women on listed company board, and it achieved the highest percentage of 42 per cent women on the board seats in 2016. In the same report, New Zealand and France accounted for the most substantial increased of women on the board seats in 2016 showing a rise by 10.1 per cent each to 27.5 per cent and 40 per cent respectively. Heilman (2001) asserted that women are not progressing at an equal rate, or to a similar level as men with equivalent performance outcomes because of gender bias in workplace evaluations. Hence, implementing gender quota system does not mean that women are promoted without considering their essential skills for leadership positions.

Many would expect that highly industrialised and urbanised countries would be among the top countries in terms of women representation in leadership positions. However, referring to McKinsey & Company (2018b), countries such as Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and South Korea are male-dominated in terms of leadership positions. Women in these countries experienced high to an extremely high-level range of gender inequality in leadership positions. Yet, these countries have high per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Per capita GDP represents a good measurement of a country's living standard. Nevertheless, it is crucial to note that women do play a vital role in decision-making positions. Based on ten years of insights into gender diversity by McKinsey & Company (2017b), women in the workforce could generate an additional \$12 trillion GDP globally. At the micro-level, there is a strong positive correlation between women representation in leadership positions and the businesses' financial performance.

In comparison to other developed nations, Japan is below the average, and this is portrayed in the World Economic Forum's Gender Inequality ranking. World

Economic Forum (2017) unveiled that in this ranking, Japan stood at 114th from among 144 countries. Holodny (2016) indicated that Japan has made an initiative to get more women into the workforce. The effort by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, appropriately nicknamed “womenomics”, aims to bring more women into the workforce with the hopes of expanding Japan’s growth potential. For businesses, higher ratios of woman manager in Japanese listed firms tend to produce higher Return on Investments and sales growth (Goldman Sachs, 2019). Shinzo Abe’s goal is to increase women in leadership positions in businesses to 30 per cent by 2020 (Fifield, 2014). The FLPR in 2015 was 49.6 per cent, contrasted to 70.3 per cent for males (Statistics Bureau, 2016), but women senior leadership positions was only 7 per cent in 2016 (Grant Thornton, 2016). Ryan (2015) highlighted that Abe has been looking forward to increasing the female employees’ participation rate and adding plans to lighten the burden for working mothers by providing more assistance to childcare. Nonetheless, changing the cultural view towards women is not expected to possibly happen in a short period.

It was stated that in 2016, American women in senior managerial position was 33 per cent, in contrast to men at 67 per cent. Women vice president was 29 per cent as opposed to 71 per cent for men, women senior vice president was 24 per cent, in contrast to 76 per cent for men and women in C-suite was only 19 per cent, contrasted with 81 per cent for men (McKinsey & Company, 2017a). Based on the stated results, it is well illustrated that the pipeline for women moving into top management positions is shrinking.

However, there is an initiative to increase the number of women on the boards. Referring to 30% Club Growth through Diversity (2017), the 30% Club is an

international organisation in the UK, with chapters worldwide that have the shared objective of obtaining 30 per cent representation of women on boards. The goal of the US 30% Club, launched in 2014, is to increase women participation in S&P 100 board seats to 30 per cent by 2020. Despite the initiatives to increase women in top management positions in the US, overall numbers of board seats held by women were 14.2 per cent in 2016, an increased by 1.9 per cent from 2015 (Deloitte, 2017). The report added that, out of 2,726 companies analysed in the US, there were only 2,784 women on the boards, with only 4.6 per cent women chief executive officer (CEO). Based on Grant Thornton (2018, p.4) report:

“Business policy is abundant; equal pay, paid parental leave, flexible hours and other policies are common around the world. But those countries in which businesses have the most policies in place are not necessarily those that demonstrate the most gender diversity. Policy alone, it seems, does not create real progress.”

Deloitte (2017) demonstrated that, of the 1,626 Asian organisations, only 7.8 per cent woman were on the boards’ seats, which stood lower than North America and Europe with 14.6 per cent and 22.6 per cent respectively. For instance, despite the Malaysian FLPR recorded standing of 54.3 per cent contrasted to 80.2 per cent of men in 2016 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2016), Deloitte (2017) added that of the 108 Malaysian companies analysed, Malaysia listed only 13.7 per cent of woman on the board seats, an increased by 3.3 per cent from the previous year. The report added woman CEOs in Malaysian companies was listed at only 5.6 per cent and woman board chairman stood at only 2.7 per cent. In the same report Deloitte (2017) also revealed that in 2016, 10.7 per cent of Singaporean women were on the board seats, an increased by 1.7 per cent from 2015. Nevertheless, the number of women board

chairpersons decreased by 1.6 per cent to 5.4 per cent in 2016. Based on Deloitte (2017, p. 30), Seah Gek Choo, Singapore Co-Leader for the Deloitte Center for Corporate Governance stated that:

“Women’s representation on the boards of companies listed on the Singapore Exchange (SGX) has improved continuously for the past five years, but the rate of increase is not encouraging. For companies to remain competitive, gender diversity must be embedded in talent and development policies. There is a need to create an environment that enables women to break the glass ceiling and provide support and sponsorship to empower more women to step forward to take on board roles that will advance their careers and develop their talent further.”

Clearly, the number of women reduces at every subsequent level. Generally, society already has a good comprehension of women career progression barriers in obtaining top management positions. However, society does not see the invisible barriers that women face in the workplace. Hence, the present research deepens the understanding of women career progression barriers. This research shows that organisations frequently overlook women’s commitment to work. Additionally, women need to give more proof of their competencies over that of their men counterparts. The ability of employers to learn to trust female employees plays a vital role in this context. Furthermore, although men and women may hold the same job position level, women will be mistakenly perceived as those who are at a much lower level than the positions that they are holding.

Women under-representation at every level of management is an increasingly prominent problem, especially when considering the higher levels of job hierarchies. Although there is a relatively small number of a senior leadership positions, men

dramatically outnumber women in those positions. There is only 1 in 5 C-suite leadership positions held by a woman (McKinsey & Company, 2018a). In addition, McKinsey & Company (2017a) findings stated that about 50 per cent of men think women were well represented in the leadership position, even when only one in ten senior leaders is a woman. This research demonstrates that men do not see anything wrong with the status quo even when there is only one woman in the top position. It is unjust for women because they are equipped to be on par with their men counterpart. Men and women should have equal opportunity and enjoy the same status to realise their potentials to contribute to the development of their organisations and the economy.

Women participation in top management is important for organisations and economic growth. Ample studies revealed that greater diversity in organisations leads to better risk management and financial performance. The results of analysing companies in Canada, the UK and the US revealed that ethnically diverse organisations and gender-diverse organisations were more likely to outperform others by 35 per cent and 15 per cent respectively (McKinsey & Company, 2015). Referring to World Economic Forum (2017), a variety of empirical studies and models propose that gender parity improvement may result in remarkable economic dividends, which differ depending on the different situation of the economies as well as the specific challenges they face. In the stated report, World Economic Forum (2017) discovered that an additional US\$250 billion could be added to the United Kingdom's GDP, US\$550 billion to Japan's GDP, US\$1,750 billion to the GDP of the US, US\$310 billion to the GDP of Germany and US\$320 billion to the GDP of France. The report further stated that there could be an increase of US\$2.5 trillion GDP in China if gender parity is achieved, and an increase of US\$5.3 trillion GDP could be achieved

in the world by 2025 as a whole by closing the gender gap in economic participation by 25 per cent over the same period.

Gender equality in top management positions is not just the best thing from a social viewpoint; it is the right thing for organisations and the economy. Having both men and women included in decision-making, widens the perspectives, enhances creativity and innovation, expands the competencies and talents pool, reduces conflicts, enhances the decision-making process, and may better describe the firm's numerous shareholders (Rose, 2007; Walt & Inglely, 2003). The aims of gender diversity are not solely concerning the number who would achieve the top positions but the work environment that could steer the success and inclusion of women in top management positions.

1.3 Problem Statement

“What prevents women from reaching the highest positions” is the question that has become a considerable concern for researchers (Chi, 2017, p. 255). Grant Thornton (2018) indicates it is explicit that policy, driven by the government or by businesses, is not contributing to a large scale of change. Grant Thornton (2018) stated that the outcomes are not widespread, not because the policy did not work in individual organisations or it was not significant, but due to no explicit correlation between the particular adopted policies and gender diversity in senior management teams.

Grant Thornton (2019) research had examined barriers that women faced, which they see necessary to overcome on their way to obtain senior leadership positions. The findings of Grant Thornton (2019) were collected from 8,000 business leaders with 4,900 surveys and interviews were carried out in November and

December 2018. The respondents were managing directors, CEOs, chairs, as well as other senior decision-making positions from 35 countries of all industry sectors. The research revealed that barriers to women career progression are limited opportunities for networking and caring responsibilities outside work. They also faced a lack of access to developmental work opportunities. These factors contribute to the significant gender imbalance in top positions. Additionally, Cimirotic, Duller, Feldbauer-Durstmuller, Gartner, and Hiebl (2017) indicated that working time, work-life imbalance, as well as motherhood, are the significant barriers that women executives face in their career advancement.

McKinsey & Company (2017a) indicated that men are more inclined to consider the workplace as fair; while women perceived the workplace offers less support and is less fair. While men considered their workplace have done good diversity support, women however perceived there could be more room for advancement. Additionally, 50 per cent of men said managers did take into account a diverse line-up of candidates, as opposed to 35 per cent of women. More than 60 per cent of men considered that their workplace has done what it takes to advance gender diversity. However, only 49 per cent of women agree. These demonstrated that women have not received equal opportunity for career progression compared to male counterpart.

Sharma and Kaur (2019) noted that female managers combining work and family are more challenged than their male counterparts, and that women career progression was found to have been affected by motherhood. According to the Bright Horizons (2019), 60 per cent of the respondents stated that less qualified employees are given career opportunities rather than working mothers, who may possess more

skilled. The report stated further that 72 per cent of both working fathers and mothers concurred that men are not penalised in their careers for starting families, but women are. Additionally, 73 per cent of mothers consider they receive fewer opportunities for career progression than women who are not mothers. In addition, 71 per cent of women who are not mothers agreed that they receive more opportunities for career progression than mothers. These findings had noted that many working mothers are facing career progression barriers.

The results of McKinsey & Company (2018a) are consistent with the earlier research study conducted by McKinsey & Company (2017a). The partnership between McKinsey and LeanIn.Org conducted a study on 279 companies in corporate America of over 64,000 employees for survey purposes and a list of qualitative interviews. Based on McKinsey & Company (2018a), companies proclaimed that they are profoundly dedicated to gender diversity. However, that dedication has not changed into significant progress because of the proportion of women in the corporate pipeline is most frequently overlooked. Figure 1.3 on the next page illustrates the apparent dearth of career progress among women in the corporate pipeline from 2015 to 2018. Even though women participation at entry-level in corporations is high, they are eventually found to be poorly represented in top management positions. The findings indicate that corporations need to intensify their efforts to increase women representation in top positions. This was revealed from the report depicting that women have been facing barriers to obtaining top management positions.

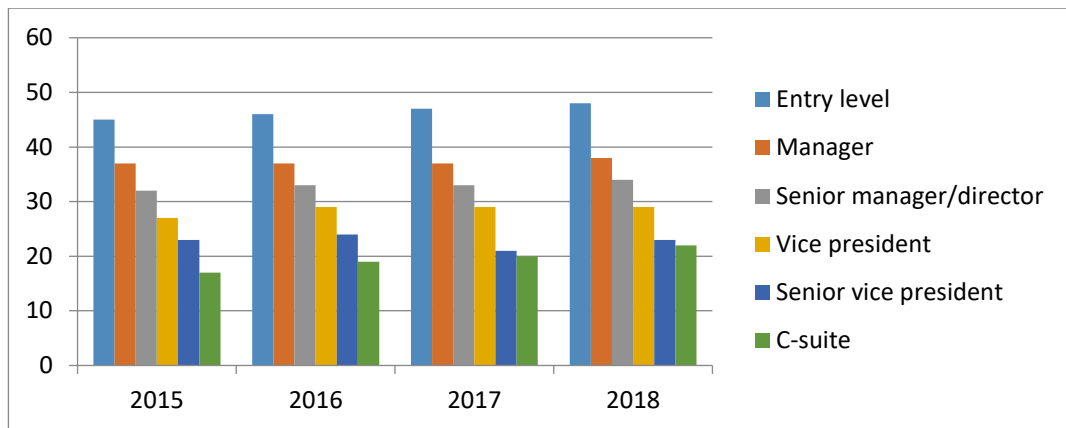


Figure 1.3 Percentages of Women by Corporate Role in 2015 to 2018

Source: McKinsey & Company (2018a)

In Asian countries, Hausmann, Tyson, and Zahidi (2011) indicated that women's economic involvement is found to be much lower than North American and European countries. Malaysia remains as one of the lowest in the Global Gender Gap Index compared to Southeast Asian and the Pacific countries, European countries and Northern America (World Economic Forum, 2017). Apart from being ranked 104th country out of over 144 countries, the Malaysian women to men ratio of legislators, senior officials and managers decreased to 0.26 in 2017 compared to 0.29 in 2016 (World Economic Forum, 2017). When moving from female labour force participation rate to women in decision-making positions, it shows increased gender gaps. Malaysian women have been facing barriers to obtain top positions. Malaysian firms with top woman managers ratio were only 0.36 (World Economic Forum, 2017). These skewed ratios is further illustrated by the fact that despite the enrolment ratio of women to men in tertiary education is 1.53, and tertiary education attainment is 1.14 for ages 25 to 54 (World Economic Forum, 2017), there is an under-representation of women in top management. Although women reach exceptional educational

attainment, this achievement is not reflected and aligned with the equitable representation of women in top management positions.

The urgency of examining the factors contributing to women career progression barriers to improving the participation of women in decision-making positions is expressed in one of Malaysia's initiatives. As of December 2016, the former Malaysia Prime Minister Dato' Sri Najib Tun Razak stated that while women accounted for 30 per cent of top management in the listed companies, the figure however excluded directors and CEOs ("Shame for Not Supporting", 2017). Dato' Sri Najib highlighted that 17 out of the top 100 companies in Bursa Malaysia have no single women director. In particular, as of December 2016, there are 1,446 women over 4,960 employees in top management, excluding CEOs ("Get more women on board", 2017). Despite this initiative, the presence of women in top management positions is still low. Women on board of directors in top PLCs increased from 19.27 per cent in 2017 to 24.4 per cent in 2018 and closer to Malaysia's 30 per cent target by 2020 (Yuen, 2019). However, the former Malaysia's Women, Family and Community Development Minister Dr Wan Azizah stated that while accomplishing the target of 30 per cent of women in the top 100 PLCs looks promising, efforts must be increased to have such outcomes in other PLCs (Yuen, 2019). Any effort to bridge top management's gender gap requires the identification of women career progression barriers.

Women continue to face barriers within organisations which impede their career progression to top management positions. Tlais and Kauser (2010) indicated that woman managers perceived organisational practices affect their career progression. This is in line with Al-Manasra (2013), whereby organisational practices

were found to have affected women career progress. The findings pointed out that women face more significant barriers than men counterparts within the workplace. Motherhood also had an effect on women career progression to top management. Hurley and Choudhary (2016) indicated that an increase in the number of children; and the number of years they spent in education, lowers the probability of the CEO being a woman. Apart from that, the inter-conflict between work responsibilities and family has had an adverse effect on women career progression (Ugwu, Kekeocha, & Chukwu, 2018). The researchers argued that work and family pressure has hindered the career progression of female professionals, primarily to top managerial level.

According to Baron and Kenny (1986, p. 1174), *“a moderator is a qualitative (e.g., sex, race, class) or quantitative (e.g., level of reward) variable that affects the direction and/or strength of the relation between an independent or predictor variable and a dependent or criterion variable”*. Chapter 2 in the present research will demonstrate there is an unexpectedly weak or inconsistent relation between a predictor and a criterion variable. Hence this research introduced a moderator variable, which is employers’ trust towards female employees. The essential component of every successful relationship is trust. Trust is a multidisciplinary concept which has been explained in various ways in accordance to different perspectives (Innocenti, Pilati, & Peluso, 2011). Research by Vanhala and Dietz (2019) examined the moderating effect of trust in employer in the Human Resource Management (HRM) and its link to performance. Their research enhances HRM and trust literatures. This moderating role of trust remains underdeveloped in the trust literature (Vanhala & Dietz, 2019). After assessing several major research of trust, Dirks and Ferrin (2001) had drawn on a conclusion that rather than as a direct contributor, the influence of trust is more overt as a moderator of other relationships. Dirks and Ferrin (2001, p. 461) recommended

the suggestion that “*situational strength*” should be investigated in future research. The researchers further added that most empirical research has concentrated on only one of these perspectives, which is subordinates’ trust in their managers.

This research revisits the form of trust (top to lower management), and attempts to extend the literature by examining whether low level of employers’ trust towards female employees moderates the positive relationship between organisational practices, motherhood and work-life conflict (independent variables) and women career progression (dependent variable). This research use Role Congruity Theory to explain women career progression barriers (the direct relationship between IVs and DV). The prejudice against women is because of the perceived incongruity between the leadership role and the feminine gender role (Garcia-Retamero & López-Zafra, 2006). The present research also used the LMX theory as the complementing theory (to explain the moderating role of employers' trust towards female employees). Dansereau, Graen, and Haga (1975) demonstrated that the LMX theory asserts that leaders form qualitatively different kinds of relationships with diverse employees. The high-quality relationship is characterised by the high level of exchanging information, respect, trust, fondness, interaction, mutual influence, extensive support, and numerous rewards. To achieve gender parity, gender gaps need to be close or at least decreased (Othman & Othman, 2015).

Successful companies are more likely to employ women in top management positions (Farrell & Hersch, 2005; Adams & Ferreira, 2009). Farrell and Hersch (2005) and Adams and Ferreira (2009) discovered that woman directors have significant impact on profitability of the firm and board input, as well as the firm value. Referring to the evidence by numerous researchers, women play a vital role in

contributing to organisations and economic. McKinsey & Company (2015) revealed that, if women participated at a level indistinguishable to that of men in the economy, it would add up to 26 per cent of annual global gross domestic product (GDP) or US\$ 28 trillion in 2025, considering a business-as-usual situation. Among the best workplaces for women are Boston Consulting Group (BCG), Hilton, Salesforce, Cisco and Edward Jones (Great Place to Work, 2019). For instance, BCG is a leader in the workplace for female employees. Female employees accounted for 91 per cent—and claim equal and fair treatment while employed by BCG (Christian, 2018). The revenue growth for BCG has reached 19 per cent at constant exchange rates, with the global sales of \$7.5 billion in 2018 (Boston Consulting Group Revenues, 2019). The report added that from 2013 to 2018, BCG had recorded double-digit growth. BCG is an example of a company that can be a benchmark for other companies worldwide. The talent pool of women needs to be empowered and tapped by organisations to expedite countries around the world towards the path of developed and high-income countries; as well as to achieve 30 per cent women participation rate at top management positions.

1.4 Research Questions

The specific research questions of the present research are as follows:

1. To what extent do organisational practices contribute to women career progression?
2. To what extent does motherhood contribute to women career progression?
3. To what extent does work-life conflict contribute to women career progression?

4. To what extent does employers' trust towards female employees play a moderating role, in the relationship between organisational practices, motherhood and work-life conflict; and women career progression?

1.5 Research Objectives

To answer the above research questions, the objectives of the present study are:

1. To examine the extent to which organisational practices contribute to women career progression.
2. To examine the extent to which motherhood contribute to women career progression.
3. To examine the extent to which work-life conflict contribute to women career progression.
4. To examine the extent to which the employers' trust towards female employees play a moderating role, in the relationship between organisational practices, motherhood and work-life conflict; and women career progression.

1.6 Scope of Study

Malaysia is aiming for at least 30 per cent women in decision-making roles by 2020, ("We're on Track", 2016). The present research examines barriers for women career progression to top management positions in PLCs. Henceforth, respondents for this research are women holding middle management positions in PLCs. The sample of this research is women in managerial level and senior executive positions. The respondents are from PLCs whose headquarters are in Ipoh, Selangor, Kuala Lumpur, Johor and Sarawak. Junior women executives are excluded from this research as

junior executives do not possess experiences of promotions; and supervisory experience in the workplace, and as such are unable to share the experience of women career progression barriers to top management.

1.7 Significance of the Study

The present research aims to examine the factors that are contributing to women career progression barriers. The importance of this research can be viewed both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, this present study will contribute to role congruity theory and Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory. With a better understanding of the barriers to women career progression, organisations and the government can implement effective strategies or solutions to improve the current situation. Apart from contributing to the research literature, the results of this research are significant for organisations which are looking into recruitment, providing equal opportunities for career progression and retaining women in top management. It can bridge the talent gap in organisations and thus lead to organisational and economic growth.

1.7.1 Theoretical Significance

Role congruity theory will be utilised in this research to explain women career progression barriers. Men and women leadership styles can be characterised as being more agentic and communal behaviours respectively. Eagly and Karau (2002) stated that some of the agentic traits displayed by men are assertiveness, aggressiveness, appearing like a leader, self-confident, self-reliant and forceful in negotiations, ambitious, independent and dominant. Eagly and Karau (2002) added further that communal behaviours associated with women are kind, gentle, empathetic, affectionate, nurturing, helpful, and sensitive. Eagly and Karau (2002) indicated that

the role congruity theory forms on it and demonstrates the prejudices held toward women in their leadership and social roles. The research findings of Garcia-Retamero and López-Zafra (2006) noted that their participants displayed prejudice against woman candidates because of the perceived incongruity between the leadership role and the feminine gender role. Women are not progressing at an equal rate or to a similar level, as men with equivalent performance outcomes, because of gender bias in workplace evaluations (Heilman, 2001). According to Eagly and Karau (2002, p. 589), *“with explicit consideration of the principles of the role congruity theory and the relevance of contextual and individual-differences variables to these principles, researchers and organizational consultants would be able to anticipate whether gender prejudice is likely in relation to selecting people for leadership roles and evaluating people who occupy these roles”*. Role congruity theory in this study is relevant as the barriers investigated in this study are such that they emanates from the perceived social roles as women.

Apart from using Role Congruity Theory to explain women career progression barriers (the direct relationship between independent variables and dependent variable), the present research also proposes to use the Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory as the complementing theory (to explain the moderating role of employers' trust towards female employees). The research of Brower, Lester, Korsgaard, and Dineen (2009) and Lagace (1991) had conducted studies on dyad trust. LMX theory has examined reciprocal or dyad trust relationship. Dansereau, Graen, and Haga (1975) revealed that the LMX theory asserts that leaders form qualitatively different kinds of relationships with diverse employees. Yammarino and Dubinsky (1992), as well as Yukl and Fu (1999), indicated that the nature of the relationship as mentioned above have an impact on the distribution of time and resources among

managers and employees. The high-quality relationship is characterised by the high level of exchanging information, respect, trust, fondness, interaction, mutual influence, extensive support, and numerous rewards. Bauer and Green (1996) highlighted that the low-quality relationship is characterised by the low level of interaction, trust, one directional influence (for instance from employee to the manager), formal relations, few rewards and limited support. LMX theory will be used to explain the moderating effect of employers' trust towards female employees between the independent variables and dependent variable in this present research.

1.7.2 Practical Significance

The findings will provide potential insights to learning institutions, policymakers, as well as implementers, working in both private and public sectors. Additionally, by studying and understanding the existence of women career progression barriers, it can assist women in middle-level positions to achieve higher performances - and subsequently better achievement - in their careers. This research will benefit women in terms of engaging critical job assignments and proactively exploring opportunities to obtain top management positions. Therefore, talented women in middle management positions would be able to access well-connected and influential top management who can assist them with career progression opportunities. Furthermore, PLCs as well as private and public organisations in all sectors, will also benefit from the present research. Organisations will further be able to strategically provide access to critical job assignment for women. Moreover, the selection processes and policies of staffing will support women to obtain access to essential career-progression job assignments, for example international tasks and operational positions. The findings of this research will also educate top management about the

unbiased appointments of women to particular positions or projects, which can assist in increasing access to career progression to top management positions. Top management will need to provide progression opportunities and learn to trust female employees.

Devillard, Sancier, Werner, Maller, and Kossof (2013) indicated that the continued stagnating number of women moving into leadership positions could lead to adverse business and social impacts globally. Much attempts have been performed by the government as all listed companies need to establish and reveal in their yearly reports their diversity policies, gender, ethnicity and age for board and management as well. A current policy-related review may be needed to assist the policymakers in comprehending factors that are contributing to women career progression barriers which are preventing women in middle-management reaching top management positions. This research will contribute to nations around the world towards obtaining high-income and becoming developed countries, as well as to achieve 30 per cent women participation in top management positions.

The findings of the present research will provide practical recommendations for bridging the gaps. Women need to be offered, and receive equal opportunities as well as encourage being involved in decision-making roles. The relationship among colleagues from higher to lower management should be based on mutual respect and professionalism, irrespective of their gender. The broad participation of women at all levels will make countries and companies become more competitive (World Economic Forum, 2010; Barch & Yee 2011), therefore essentially addressing this knowledge gap of the factors contributing to barriers for women career progression. According to Aguirre, Hoteit, Rupp, and Sabbagh (2012), women's economic