

MARKET RESEARCH ON WORKPLACE GENDER EQUALITY IN VIETNAM

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Abstract: Gender equality in Vietnam has been significantly improved thanks to the strong commitment of the Government as well as changes by Vietnamese the young Vietnamese generations over the last few decades. In different areas, the gaps between men and women have been narrowed. Today, women are healthier, better educated, and more powerful in politics and economics. Women's voices are increasingly being heard in decision-making processes both in the public and in organizations. Yet this achievement has not met expectations. More Vietnamese women, however, work in low-income occupations or vulnerable jobs than men (ILO, 2018). Additionally, based on The World Bank data in 2018, women received 12.6% less in salary than men given the same education level, ethnic group, and age (World Bank, 2018). Position of women in the labour market is heavily affected by the socio-economic disadvantages stemming from gender-based discrimination. Most Vietnamese women have less access to productive resources, education, skills development and employment opportunities than men.

In 2020, Vietnam Business Coalition for Women Empowerment (VBCWE) and Deloitte Market research team in Vietnam have conducted a market research on gender equality issues within Vietnamese workplace to explore the current status of workplace gender equality (WGE) among enterprise community in Vietnam, their attitudes towards WGE, existing corporate shortcomings, and obstacles that are preventing the development of WGE. Our research analyzes and evaluates the topic based on the survey of 236 enterprises in Vietnam with the majority is the private sector. The research witnessed the interest of the majority of Vietnam businesses in workplace gender equality. Nearly half of respondents, however, have not applied or implemented any workplace gender equality-related policy or action. It is also notable that among surveyed businesses, those are in manufacturing or export sector showed their actual demand on the research topic due to trade integration requirement and international agreement on labor quality.

This report has been funded by Investing in Women, an initiative of the Australian Government through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade that catalyses inclusive economic growth through women's economic empowerment in South East Asia. Investing in Women works with influential companies on shifting workplace cultures, practices and policy barriers to achieve workplace gender equality (WGE) in Indonesia, Myanmar, the Philippines and Vietnam.

Key words: workplace gender equality (WGE), labor code, labor market, private enterprise, VBCWE.

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Tóm tắt: Bình đẳng giới ở Việt Nam đã được cải thiện nhờ sự cam kết mạnh mẽ của Chính phủ cũng như những thay đổi của thể hệ trẻ Việt Nam trong vài thập kỷ qua. Trong các lĩnh vực khác nhau, khoảng cách giữa nam và nữ ngày càng được thu hẹp. Ngày nay, phụ nữ khoẻ mạnh hơn, có sự giáo dục tốt hơn và có quyền hơn trên cả trường chính trị và kinh tế. Tiếng nói của phụ nữ ngày càng được coi trọng trong quá trình đưa ra quyết định ở cả trong xã hội và trong các tổ chức. Tuy nhiên chúng vẫn chưa đáp ứng được kỳ vọng. Vẫn còn nhiều phụ nữ phải làm những công việc có thu nhập thấp hoặc công việc nguy hiểm hơn nam giới (theo ILO 2018). Hơn nữa, dữ liệu của Ngân hàng Thế giới, năm 2018 mức lương phụ nữ nhận được thấp hơn nam giới 12,6%, mặc dù có cùng trình độ học vấn, nhóm dân tộc và độ tuổi (theo Ngân hàng Thế giới năm 2018). Vị thế của nữ giới trên thị trường lao động bị ảnh hưởng nặng nề bởi những bất lợi về kinh tế và xã hội do phân biệt đối xử trên cơ sở giới đem lại. Hầu hết phụ nữ Việt Nam ít được tiếp cận với các nguồn lực sản xuất, giáo dục, phát triển kỹ năng và cơ hội việc làm hơn nam giới.

Trong năm 2020, Mạng lưới doanh nghiệp Việt Nam hỗ trợ phát triển quyền năng phụ nữ và nhóm nghiên cứu thị trường Deloitte tại Việt Nam đã thực hiện một nghiên cứu thị trường về các vấn đề bình đẳng giới tại nơi làm việc ở Việt Nam nhằm tìm hiểu thực trạng bình đẳng giới tại nơi làm việc (WGE) trong cộng đồng doanh nghiệp tại Việt Nam, thái độ đối với WGE, những thiếu sót hiện tại của doanh nghiệp và những rào cản đang cản trở sự phát triển của WGE. Nghiên cứu của chúng tôi phân tích và đánh giá đề tài dựa trên việc khảo sát 236 doanh nghiệp tại Việt Nam, đa số là khu vực kinh tế tư nhân. Nghiên cứu cho thấy dự quan tâm của đa số doanh nghiệp Việt Nam đối với vấn đề bình đẳng giới tại nơi làm việc. Tuy nhiên, gần một nửa trong số người được phỏng vấn đã không áp dụng hoặc thực hiện bất kỳ chính sách hoặc hành động nào liên quan đến bình đẳng giới tại nơi làm việc. Điều đáng chú ý là trong số các doanh nghiệp được khảo sát, các doanh nghiệp đang hoạt động trong lĩnh vực sản xuất hoặc xuất khẩu cho thấy nhu cầu thực tế của họ đối với chủ đề nghiên cứu là do yêu cầu hội nhập thương mại và thoả thuận quốc tế về chất lượng lao động.

Bài báo này cũng được quỹ Đầu tư vào Phụ nữ, một sáng kiến của Chính phủ Úc thông qua Bộ Ngoại giao và Thương mại nhằm thúc đẩy tăng trưởng kinh tế bao trùm thông qua trao quyền kinh tế cho phụ nữ ở Đông Nam Á. Quỹ Đầu tư vào Phụ nữ làm việc với các công ty có ảnh hưởng trong việc thay đổi văn hoá, thực tiễn và rào cản chính sách tại nơi làm việc để đạt được bình đẳng giới tại nơi làm việc (WGE) ở In-đô-nê-xi-a, My-an-mar, Phi-líp-pin và Việt Nam.

Từ khoá: bình đẳng giới tại nơi làm việc (WGE), luật lao động, thị trường lao động, doanh nghiệp tư nhân, VBCWE.

1. Introduction

The paper is written based on research by the Vietnam Business Alliance for Women's Empowerment (VBCWE) and Deloitte Market research group in Vietnam in 2020. equality in Vietnamese businesses. The goal of the survey is to create a quantitative analysis of gender equality in Vietnamese businesses. Through this process, we generate industrial insights on how companies in Vietnam are doing to promote workplace gender equality (WGE), their attitudes towards WGE, existing corporate shortcomings, and obstacles that are preventing the

development of WGE. The survey results are expected to provide the views from researched companies on how they are perceiving and taking action towards WGE, which would raise some suggestions on how VBCWE should approach and support companies on WGE matters.

2. Research strategy

This research is quantitatively oriented to evaluate WGE surveys among different types of private enterprises in Vietnam using statistical data (Quinlan & Zikmund, 2015).

Quantitative research is useful for this study for many reasons. The first reason is to provide quantitative research that can approach and validate large and diverse participants, which can help to generalize to a larger population. The research relates to people working in a large number of private businesses. Therefore, the results received by survey will vary in terms of the company type as well as the background of the survey participants (not only HR function participated in this survey). Meanwhile, quantitative research can approach and validate large and diverse participants, which can help to generalize to a larger population (Allwood, 2012).

Secondly, quantitative research can provide objective results in combination with an appropriate selection of statistical tests (He, 2016; Gray, 2013) to validate the conclusions made at desk research phase 1, thereby helping the research team to have an objective view of the needs of WGE in the private sector. Particularly, quantitative research is suggested to help the researchers not only test or compare different variables among different sectors but also uncover the deeper meaning of specific individual responses.

3. Sampling

The sample was partially a convenience sample and a snowball sample. The sample was initially comprised of contacts to whom the research team was able to approach (e.g. clients, associations). To reach the goal, snowball sampling methods was used to deliver the survey to 4,125 companies, which resulted in 392 survey responses. However, 156 respondents were excluded due to data incompleteness, leaving only 236 survey respondents qualified for further data analysis. The research team asked for associations' support to pass the questionnaire to any person that could be a participant (Emerson, 2015). To describe the larger population and minimize selection biases, the population is divided into sub-populations called strata, and random samples are drawn from each of the strata, or elements are drawn from the sample on a proportional basis. Details of the sample, as well as the collected responses being divided into different characteristics (e.g. sector, business size, department, and location), will be shown below, in "1.3. Demographic characteristics of the sample". Continuing our earlier research result in the phase of Desk research, all entities that interest in WGE which have been discovered will be included in the quantitate research.

According to a previous discussion on the goal of maximize feedback by the survey, we focused on gathering responses of the Potential list through reminds and follow-up direct calls with the survey participants. In this phase, the research team identified them as

“Potential list” which means the target respondents that were being closely approached for surveys collecting than the remaining list. A reminder email and follow-up direct calls made to gain as many responses as possible from the “Potential list”.

4. Data collection and analysis

Based on the scale of regional dispersion of the target population, the flexibility of asking questions, the respondents’ willingness to participate, and the response accuracy, we administered the survey mainly by sending out the Online Form. Besides, for those who are identified as Potential list, telephone survey is add on to enhance their response rate. The survey was conducted for duration of one month: from 01 September 2020 to 30 September 2020. There are separated online links for Vietnamese and Foreigner to access, as we approached both local and foreign managers, even those who are not in the HR department as well as non-C-suite levels, asking them to forward and recommend the survey to the target respondents in their company, to find best approaches to the target entity of this project. The back-translation was used to create English questions to ensure validity (Chidlow et al., 2014) as there could be misunderstandings or misleading terminologies.

Sample stands at 4,125, and we break it down into different categories. The number of completed response rate to the total sample of manufacturing is the highest at 13%.

As part of the research purpose to collect and evaluate the views on WGE of companies in the Vietnamese market, the quantitative analysis was processed using Excel and SPSS to analyze, interpret, report the results and generate insights in preparation for the implementation in next steps.

5. Results of descriptive analysis

5.1 Identify demands around WGE among businesses

5.1.1 Understanding of WGE

As a starting point of the survey, the research team measures the market’s WGE understanding level by asking respondents to choose among statements concerning what comes to their attention when mentioning WGE. The collected data will be (a) descriptively analyzed and broken down by demographical characteristics and (b) score calculation for individual understanding of WGE will be implemented.

Descriptive analysis

Table 1. *List of statements in the first question*

No.	Statements	Classification
1.1	Enforce equality in the working environment and conditions between male and female workers.	Correct

No.	Statements	Classification
1.2	<i>Protect women's rights and encourage the development and promotion of female workers</i>	<i>Incorrect</i>
1.3	<i>Balance the proportion of females and males in the labor force at all levels (e.g. staff level, intermediate management level, senior-level).</i>	<i>Incorrect</i>
1.4	Equivalent salary, bonus, and other benefits between male and female employees at a similar level and position.	Correct
1.5	The company has a policy framework to ensure the implementation of equal career development between male and female employees.	Correct
1.6	The company offers an inclusive business culture and an equal, safe, and happy working environment.	Correct
1.7	<i>Recruit women to do jobs usually conducted by men.</i>	<i>Incorrect</i>
1.8	<i>Equalize the gender-based number of workers within the company.</i>	<i>Incorrect</i>
1.9	<i>Take into account gender-stereotypical factors when considering promotion in directing/management positions.</i>	<i>Incorrect</i>
1.10	The company supports both male and female workers in undertaking social and family responsibilities.	Correct

From the collected data, we spot the majority of respondents (above 75%) chose the correct statements, indicating a potentially correct yet extensive understanding of WGE-related issues of the market in general.

Besides, less than 28% of respondents choosing the incorrect ones. Yet, within the incorrect statements, “Protect women’s rights and encourage the development and promotion of female workers” was chosen at an extremely high average percentage (more than 55%).

Break down by sector, it can be seen that FMCG and Manufacturing/Export were recorded as the two highest percentages of people choosing incorrect statements in almost all areas, extremely in “Protect women’s rights and encourage the development and promotion of female workers” (with 70% and 62% respectively).

Table 2: Percentages of respondents choosing the incorrect statements – break down by sectors

Statements	Banking/ Insurance/ Finance	FMCG	Manufacturing/ Export	Others	Prefer not to say
1.2. Protect women’s rights and encourage the development and promotion of female workers.	48,0	70,0	62,0	57,0	43,0
1.3. Balance the proportion of female and male in the labor force at all levels (e.g. staff level, intermediate management level, senior level, etc.)	27,0	30,0	31,0	14,0	29,0

Statements	Banking/ Insurance/ Finance	FMCG	Manufacturing/ Export	Others	Prefer not to say
1.4. Recruit women to do jobs usually conducted by men.	11,0	30,0	29,0	14,0	14,0
1.5. Equalize the gender-based number of workers within the company.	9,0	0,0	18,0	7,0	14,0
1.6. Take into account gender-stereotypical factors when considering promotion in directing/management positions.	18,0	50,0	22,0	14,0	29,0

Based on the respondent's answers in the survey, backed by social media data from desk research, we discover the potential lack of a clear definition of WGE among respondents, which creates *confusion in understanding women empowerment and gender equality* among research respondents. Further investigation in this survey is needed before we fully apprehend our understanding and uncover insights of WGE in Vietnam. From the perspective of the research team, potential key drivers of ambivalence towards workplace gender equality in Vietnam, which implicate deeper understanding in phase 03 can be grouped into three main categories:

1. Framing of issues around workplace gender equality (What is workplace gender equality? Who does it affect? Who does it harm or benefit? Where are these perceptions coming from?). Potential issues related to framing WGE as a "women's issue" - Because potential gains in addressing gender inequality are often perceived as belonging to women, the responsibility to address gender inequality is also being placed on women.

2. Cultural context within which workplace gender equality is intertwined with cultural practices, traditions, relationships, and foundational understandings: With most of our respondents in upper-middle management roles, potential generational divides between older generation points of view (generations born during wartime) in contrast with staff who are mostly millennials, confronted with old ways of thinking, being and working in the context of today's economic and societal realities.

3. Institutional and societal context: Potential lagging in perceptions/generation gap because economics, culture, and education in Vietnam have changed dramatically in recent decades

In the "Overall market research through social media checking" section of Desk study (Deloitte research team, 2020), we also checked the keywords "Women Empowerment Principles" but the results returned only 01 article. However, in this phase we re-scanned with keywords: "Women Empowerment" and "Trao quyền cho phụ nữ" with a time period (2015 - May 2020), the total results are as table 5, in which the number of 02 keywords returned accounts for 24% of the total articles returned by 23 keywords.

Thereby shows that the media coverage of the Women Empowerment theme is very broad, which is also one of the supporting points to explain the perception confusion awareness between WGE and Women Empowerment.

Table 3: *Media checking for Women Empowerment topic*

No	Keywords	No of articles	Contribution
1	Women empowerment	220	8,0
2	Trao quyền cho phụ nữ	440	16,0
3	Other keywords	2,112	76,0
Total		2,772	100,0

These key drivers imply that there will be much to do to clarify the understanding of workplace gender equality, and hence, presents both challenges and opportunities for actors, as the solution-provider, by providing services and products that help enhance businesses' understanding as well as to encourage their practice of WGE.

a) *Score calculation for individual understanding of WGE*

Syntax: total score for Question 1 in individual response is the sum of 10 statements' scores, in which, score of each statement is given as below:

The syntax for scoring: Correct: Did not choose = 0; Chose = 1; Incorrect: Did not choose = 1; Chose = 0.

The average score is 7.5636 with the standard deviation being 1.58992. The standard deviation is quite small, meaning that there seems to be relatively minor difference among responses toward this question.

Table 4: *Score calculation for individuals understanding of WGE*

N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
236	2.00	10.00	7.5636	1.58992

The responses are categorized based on 3 levels of understanding, namely Level 1, Level 2, Level 3 with Level 3 is the highest.

- Level 3 ($8 \leq \text{score} \leq 10$)
- Level 2 ($5 \leq \text{score} < 8$)
- Level 1 ($\text{score} < 5$)

Table 5: *Levels of understanding of WGE*

	Frequency	Percent
Level 1	6	2,5
Level 2	95	40,3
Level 3	135	57,2
Total	236	100,0

More than 97% of participants surveyed at levels 2 and 3 of which nearly 60% of the survey participants are at level 3.

This result has clearly shown that though the majority of companies had raised their awareness of WGE and start to understand the importance of having gender equality in the workplace; however, they might be seeing gender equality as empowering women and might not be paying sufficient attention to promote WGE as its true self.

5.1.2 Interest in WGE

a) Descriptive analysis

Question 2: Please indicate your level of interest in WGE? (Please rate based on the scale below)

<i>Not interested yet</i>				<i>Very interested</i>
1	2	3	4	5

The second question in our questionnaire surveys the market’s level of interest in WGE under a scale from 1 to 5 with 5 being “Very interested”. The result shows that 66% express their interest at levels of 4 and 5, suggesting a very positive appetite for WGE development among businesses. In the detail of *Manufacturing/Export sector*, 48.2% companies with *under 300 employees* demonstrate the highest average level of interest (From 3.90 out of 5.00), slightly higher in comparison with companies that have *more than 300 employees* (From 3.85 out of 5.00).

Figure 1. Breakdown of Interest Level Scores (on a scale of 5)

Note: In general, on a scale of 5, interest ranks of 4 and 5 account for 36% and 30% of total responses, suggesting a positive appetite for WGE development among businesses.

The result from desk study indicate that the manufacturing industry has the majority of the workforce being female workers and it was assumed that manufacturers would be more interested in WGE. This assumption is confirmed based on the data of the survey when Manufacture depicts the highest level of interest (3.90/5.00). As companies in this sector show a keen interest in WGE, we expect they accordingly have a certainly high level of understanding about WGE. However, companies in Manufacturing sector are still among the highest percentage of

respondents choosing incorrect statements about WGE. This is possibly a greenfield for VBCWE to approach those businesses in Manufacturing sector since they basically show interest in WGE, but then we suggest that VBCWE should facilitate public workshops with different agendas to enhance awareness of WGE and help them understand the importance of WGE and provide customized WGE solutions in accordance with client needs.

b) Reasons for interest in WGE

Table 6: *List of Reasons for Interest in WGE*

No.	Reasons for Interest in WGE
2.1.1	I recognize the imbalances in the roles and opportunities for career development of female and male in my business/organization.
2.1.2	I want to create an image of an innovative and civilized business/organization pioneering in gender equality to enhance the reputation of my business/organization.
2.1.3	I expect that the WGE lead to positive outcomes and development for my business.
2.1.4	Because gender equality is one of the criteria in the strategic orientation of my business.
2.1.5	I expect that gender diversity in my workplace will lead to other positive business outcomes such as attracting top talent, improved retention, improved staff satisfaction or increased innovation and business resilience.
2.1.6	I want to contribute to the elimination of gender stereotypes that still exist quite commonly in social life and at work.
2.1.7	Because my business/organization needs to comply with legal regulations and policies.

Table 6 shows that the most selected reasons for interest are: (2.1.5) I expect that gender diversity in my workplace will lead to other positive business outcomes such as attracting top talent, improved retention, improved staff satisfaction, or increased innovation and business resilience; (2.1.6) I want to contribute to the elimination of gender stereotypes that still exist quite commonly in social life and at work.

The survey provides further insights into reasons for interest in WGE issues that respondents can choose multiple reasons at once. The most selected reason is “*I expect that gender diversity in my workplace will lead to other positive business outcomes such as attracting top talents, improved retention, improved staff satisfaction or increased innovation and business resilience*”. The runner-up is “*I want to contribute to the elimination of gender stereotypes that still exist quite commonly in social life and at work*”. Notably, of all the respondents who pick these 02 reasons, the Manufacturing/Export sector accounts for more than 65% and 64% respectively.

a) Correlations between understanding of WGE and their interest in WGE

Data shows that there are differences between participants’ interest in WGE and their understanding in some respects, which are:

- Protect women’s rights and encourage the development and promotion of female workers (1.2)

- The company supports both male and female workers in undertaking social and family responsibilities (1.10)

- The company has a policy framework to ensure the implementation of equal career development between male and female employees (1.5)

The percentage of people choosing 1.5 and levels of interest have the most significant relationship among these three statements listed. Particularly, this percentage is directly proportional to the level of interest in WGE. Additionally, more than 70% of people being interested in WGE at different levels chose this correct statement while only one-third of people who are not interested in this topic chose this statement.

5.1.3 WGE-related policy implementation

The third aim in the survey studies different extents of commitment to promoting WGE among businesses where we asked the participants to state whether they have implemented policies on WGE in different areas and whether they evaluate the effectiveness of the policy implementation.

Correspondingly, we find that the highest level of commitment is recorded in the following top 05 areas, ranking from the highest to the lowest:

- Pay, salary, benefit (31,8%)
- Recruitment, selection, and promotion (29,7%)
- Preventing and addressing gender-based harassment and discrimination, sexual harassment, and bullying (29,2%)
- Flexible work for performance and support (28,0%)
- Gender composition of the workforce (27,5%)

The lowest is in these 02 areas:

- Strategic alignment of gender equality and business priorities
- WGE training

Overall, these results once again confirm that companies are starting to express their interest in WGE and finding ways to embed WGE in their policies in different areas of compensation and benefit, selection and promotion, health and safety as well as flexible work environments. Interestingly, while WGE is being introduced to different HR policies, the strategic alignment of gender equality and business priorities is the least committed. This may imply that WGE is being viewed bottom-up, rather than top-down, where top management might need to be persuaded of the positive impact of WGE on business outcomes. Hence, for WGE to be implemented successfully, it needs to be supported by top management; thus, top management needs to understand the impact of WGE on business priorities.

Table 7: Strategic alignment of gender equality and business priorities

Which of the following aspect(s) related to WGE have your company implemented	Not yet implement any policy related to this topic	Have a plan and allocated resources but not implement yet	Already implement but not monitor and evaluate yet	Already implement, monitor and evaluate the results	Percentage of “Already implement” [(3) + (4)] out of the total responses	Percentage of (3) out of Total responses “Already implement” [(3) + (4)]
	(1)	(2)	(3)		[(3)+(4)] / Total	(3) / [(3)+(4)]
1. Strategic alignment of gender equality and business priorities (Does your company have a gender equality strategy?).	37,0	8,0	33,0	22,0	55,08	59,0
2. Leadership and accountability for WGE outcomes.	33,0	18,0	23,0	25,0	48,73	48,0
3. Gender pay equity.	40,0	6,0	19,0	34,0	53,39	37,0
4. Gender composition of the workforce.	40,0	7,0	25,0	28,0	53,39	47,0
5. Mainstreaming flexible work for performance and support.	31,0	6,0	36,0	28,0	63,14	56,0
6. Preventing and addressing gender-based harassment and discrimination, sexual harassment and bullying.	29,0	18,0	26,0	27,0	52,97	49,0
7. Professional development, mentoring, sponsorship.	33,0	7,0	25,0	34,0	59,75	43,0
8. Recruitment, selection, and promotion.	40,0	7,0	25,0	28,0	52,54	47,0
9. Talent management and succession planning.	40,0	8,0	25,0	26,0	51,69	49,0
10. WGE training.	46,0	26,0	14,0	15,0	28,39	48,0

About a third of the respondents declared that their companies had not implemented any WGE-related policies in almost all areas. Furthermore, nearly half (specifically, 46%) of the respondents informed that their company did not have WGE training programs, of which, the proportion of companies in the Manufacturing sector had not implemented WGE-related training accounts for about 50%.

Of the remainder, around 50% (except for “WGE training” which is recorded at the percentage of 28,39%) respondents said that their companies have implemented gender equity policies. Moreover, the two areas that recorded the highest policy implementation rates were “Mainstreaming flexible work for performance and support” and “Professional development, mentoring, sponsorship” (63,14% and 59,75% respectively).

However, around half of this organizations already implemented WGE-related policies have not monitored or evaluated yet. Of the remainder, around 50% (except for

“WGE training” which is recorded at the percentage of 28,39%) respondents said that their companies have implemented gender equity policies. in the fields of. In particular, the two areas that recorded the highest policy implementation rates were “Mainstreaming flexible work for performance and support” and “Professional development, mentoring, sponsorship” (63,14% and 59,75% respectively).

Table 8: *The stipulation of Levels of commitment and WGE-related policy implementation*

Level of implementation	Already implemented, monitored and evaluated the results	Already implemented but not monitor and evaluate yet	Have a plan and allocated resources but not implement yet	Not yet implemented any policy related to this topic
Level of commitment to promoting WGE	Highest	High	Low	Lowest
Score	3	2	1	0

Table 9: *Scoring of commitment in promoting WGE*

Mean	14.8174
Median	15.5
Std. Deviation	9.12033
Minimum	0
Maximum	30
Coefficient of variation	0.61621

Through the scoring level of commitment in promoting WGE across survey respondents, we can understand the strength and direction of the relationship between levels of commitment and WGE-related policy implementation (Gray, 2013, p.314) in addition to the coefficient of variation, which shows the extent of variability (Brown, 1998).

With the coefficient of variation of 61%, standard deviation of 9.12033 and mean of 14.8174, it indicates that the scores in the distribution are spread out away from the mean (Mertler & Reinhart, 2016, p.8). From this, we can conclude that there is a considerable gap in commitments among businesses in promoting WGE. Furthermore, based on the results of our research, while manufacturing sector have high commitment and interest toward WGE, the potentials misunderstanding of WGE which was discovered previous section suggested opportunities to reeducate, provide expertise for decision makers and provide end-to-end solutions for manufacturers.

The score is categorized into three groups, illustrating the level of the company’s commitment to promoting WGE, specifically:

Level 1 - High commitment: score from 23.93773 to 30

Level 2 - Medium commitment: score from 14.8174 to below 23.93773

Level 3 - Low commitment: Below 14.8174

Table 10: Levels of commitment to promoting WGE in different sectors

		Sector					Total	
		TMT	FMCG	Others	Prefer not to say	Finance/ Banking/ Insurance		Manufacturing
Level 1	Count	0	1	20	0	5	18	44
	% within Sector	,0	11,1	17,7	,0	19,2	24,7	18,6
Level 2	Count	4	7	75	5	17	41	149
	% within Sector	50,0	77,8	66,4	71,4	65,4	56,2	63,1
Level 3	Count	4	1	18	2	4	14	43
	% within Sector	50,0	11,1	15,9	28,6	15,4	19,2	18,2

Note: In general, companies in different sectors are implementing WGE-related policies at level 2 of commitment

Overall, these results once again confirm that companies are starting to express their interest in WGE and finding ways to embed WGE in their policies in different areas of compensation and benefit, selection and promotion, health and safety as well as flexible work environments. Interestingly, while WGE is being introduced to different HR policies, the strategic alignment of gender equality and business priorities is the least committed.

5.1.4 Roadblocks that impedes companies from promoting WGE

Table 11: List of difficulties in promoting WGE

No.	Difficulty
4.1	No recognition that gender inequality is a problem in the workplace.
4.2	Lack of resources (e.g.: human resources, finance) to deploy.
4.3	The development orientation of the company is not yet concerned about WGE.
4.4	There has been no agreement among the business leaders on gender equality issue.
4.5	There are other priority issues that the company chooses to focus on at this time.

Data show More than half of respondents claim there is “No recognition that gender inequality is a problem in the workplace”. In this pool of respondents, 65% are in the Manufacturing/Export sector. It can be concluded that the lack of acknowledgment of gender inequality among businesses might be due to an incorrect understanding of gender equality.

The most prevalent difficulty in implementing and promoting WGE, which makes up more than half of responses, is “No recognition that gender inequality is a problem in the workplace”. Ironically, the Manufacturing/Export sector itself hardly acknowledges any gender inequality problems in the workplace, since 65% of respondents selecting this answer are in Manufacturing/Export.

This point seemingly conflicts with the first finding we made when we said that most people have a correct understanding of WGE. Although we think people are starting to understand what WGE is and how important it is, the level of awareness to evaluate equality across a wider spectrum of WGE is limited, leading to a false awareness of WGE and an inability to recognize that gender equality is a problem in the workplace.

Moreover, most manufacturing companies are hiring more female workers, which is why they do not see they are having problems with WGE, but if they show their interest in promoting WGE, it is time to show them that WGE is more than an equal number of female and male workers. This implies a common view of gender equality that is based on the equality of females and males but does not seek a deeper analysis of layers of pay, promotion/progression, policies, frameworks and support for female workers, etc.

6. Impact of unstable event and trade agreements toward gender equality at the workplace in Vietnam

In the situation of unstable events, such as COVID-19 or changes in business activities thanks to several Trade agreements, we expect that there can be some changes in the interest and understanding of WGE. Further investigations in Phase 03 will be needed to get more information about the influences of these situation on understanding and interest in WGE.

Although we have not had a comprehensive research on the impact of COVID-19 on WGE, the negative impact of gender inequality can be seen to be amplified as the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 has resulted in an increased burden of housework and childcare, along with having to adapt to the new realities of the workforce for women (ILO, 2020; Investing in Women Asia, 2020).

In the period of 2021-25, the government made efforts to liberalize the economy through signing new international trade agreements (especially EVFTA, CPTPP, and RCEP), so Vietnam will promote reforms and adapting Vietnamese laws and institutions to conform to ILO standards. The release of the new Labor Code for 2021 will help promote gender equality through the elimination of discrimination in the workplace (Economist Intelligence Unit Limited, 2020, pp.6–8; Dezan Shira et la. , 2019; Vietnam Law & Legal Forum, 2020; Hanoi times, 2020). These dramatic changes may place WGE under the limelight as one of the key requirements for sustainable development in the forthcoming years (Bublienė, R. & Jurkevičius, V., 2020), and business leaders will play a key role in establishing the foundation for implementing gender equality initiatives in the workplace. This is an opportunity for VBCWE to stay one step ahead, raising awareness, guiding businesses, and pposition as problem solver towards WGE in Vietnam.

7. Conclusion

This survey has shown interest in workplace gender equality, but in reality, businesses still do not understand workplace gender equality and Women's Empowerment. Through the

survey, most companies have not implemented any workplace gender equality related policies, accounting for 46% of all surveyed companies. It is a great opportunity for intervention programs increase their awareness of workplace gender equality, develop and deliver education initiatives focusing on guiding businesses to implement policies related to WGE, and measuring the impact of this policy on the sustainable development of the company.

For the Manufacturing / Export sector, it's crucial to explore their need for workplace gender equality in the context of trade integration and the post-covid-19 context to help these businesses implement workplace gender equality to facilitate development for female workers. Regarding who decides to implement workplace gender equality in the enterprise, we believe that the smooth implementation of workplace gender equality will largely depend on the CEO's decision. Therefore, changing the CEO's mindset on the importance of WGE is essential for the sustainable development of a business and also the key to the success. For the next phase, for each specific business, we should dig into the main factors that help the CEO come up with a WGE implementation plan. From there, there are strategies for the future.

The findings from the survey open up both problems and opportunities for the agencies working on workplace gender equality in Vietnam.

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