National College of Ireland

A Study Identifying the Progression of Women in the Telecommunications Industry and how HR Departments can Improve Gender Diversity through Initiatives and Programs.

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Dissertation

MA Human Resource Management.

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Abstract

In this research, the author will investigate the barriers women still face when progressing in the telecommunication industry. The research will be conducted on how a company's human resource department can help support females progressing within the industry.

The author conducted primary research with various people in the HR department of a multinational telecommunications company to discover what they are doing to support women in the industry and how it has changed over the years. A qualitative method of research was used through semi-structured interviews.

From these interviews, the researcher found that the organisation believes there is still much to be done, and currently has a plan to achieve total gender equality by 2030. Significant findings include that company X completely supports females with the same right to progress. However, there is not enough room at the leadership level for progression yet. Gender diversity initiatives are in place, and the company has the workplace culture to support these changes. However, they must plan to achieve this without room for progression. This research discusses barriers which prevent progression and how a company can support advancement.

Declaration

Declaration

The work submitted for examination is wholly my own, and all materials consulted. Ideas gathered in the process of researching for the dissertation have been properly and accurately acknowledged.

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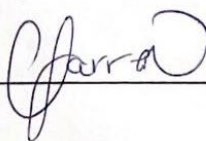MA in Human Resource Management

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Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter introduces gender diversity in the telecommunications industry and how it has changed over the years. It will outline barriers that female employees still face in their professional careers and make discussions about what a human resource department can implement to create a workplace that is more gender diverse.

There has been a lack of women in the telecommunications industry, and companies are looking to improve this (Gascoigne et al., 2022). According to the Central Statistics Office (2019), only 32% of those employed in an ICT-related sector in Ireland were women in 2019, which shows there is still a lot to be done to reach the level companies should be at (CSO, 2019). Increased gender diversity in the workplace can lead to positive results for the company, such as increased competitive advantage, better performance for employees, and increased applicants for job advertisements (Ud Din et al., 2018).

The lack of females studying degrees in STEM-related fields is an essential factor behind the lack of women in the industry. Women who enter a STEM field are even more likely to leave than men (Chowdhury et al., 2021). Women are more likely to enter a STEM-related career if there are role models (Diekman, Weisgram, and Belanger, 2015). Organisations have started to focus on gender balance in executive and corporate roles. Businesses believe a positive relationship exists between employees' performance and gender diversity (Reddy and Jadhav, 2019).

In the early 20th century, there were more women working in call centres for telecoms, as the men were off fighting in World War 1. They needed people to operate the phones to get valuable information. Women were still paid significantly lower than men, even though they were the leading operators. Since then, women's role in telecommunications has declined (Orange, 2022). In 2021, Orange reported that only 36% of their staff was women (Orange, 2022).

Smith and Schonfeld (2000) discussed the increased importance of gender diversity in the United States in 1997. A survey conducted by 'Ford Foundation's Campus Diversity' in 1998 revealed that 90% of those surveyed felt diversity is essential. The same survey also found that diversity allows for better "critical thinking" and more role models in the industry, giving women confidence. They believed this would decrease stereotypes of women in the working

world (Smith and Schonfeld, 2000). This increased focus on gender diversity began to take away the ideologies of social norms that believed women should stay at home to look after their children while the man went to work. Recently, it has become apparent that more women are entering the working world (Zarzycki et al., 2022).

The lack of women taking on STEM-related subjects is due to no encouragement in school (Chowdhury et al., 2021). Science Foundation Ireland started in 2000 to improve STEM research and support education in these fields. The Irish Research Council (IRC) put in place a plan to support called the 'Gender Strategy and Action Plan 2013-2020' to investigate the lack of women in STEM fields and determine if lack of gender diversity leads to poorer outcomes (Dunne et al., 2022).

With diversity being the focus of companies recently organisations have begun to implement initiatives with a focus on women in the workplace and to encourage female employees to progress (Kulik, 2022). Ibec conducted a report to determine women's participation in STEM-related fields between 2001 and 2018 (Keogh, 2020). CIPD (2015) and (2022) have conducted several studies on gender diversity. Research has found that no studies show that organisations in the STEM field have become gender diverse. None of these studies discuss the telecommunications. The author can conclude that there is still a gap in literature about whether any initiatives and programs to promote gender diversity implemented by telecommunications companies have succeeded.

While companies have started to bring in initiatives and programs, there seems to be little improvement, with few women sitting in the board room. How can organisations work towards improving this? With the new commitment and focus on gender diversity, are organisations doing enough to enforce this?

Research aims and objectives

This study aims to determine whether women have made progress in the telecommunications industry and whether a company's human resources department can support the progress of female employees in their careers through programs and initiatives. The focus will be to determine if women have progressed in their careers and if companies are supporting the progression.

The study will investigate gender diversity initiatives in the telecommunications industry, which will be informed through an interview process conducted with HR professionals within a multinational telecommunications company. The author will determine what the organisation is doing to enforce gender diversity and the success rates to date.

The fundamental reason behind this research is to investigate whether women have had progression opportunities, and whether the human resource department of a telecommunication company can help support and enforce progression through initiatives and programs based on gender diversity.

Objective 1

'Determine if the telecommunications industry has progressed in the last ten years and become gender diverse.'

This will be done by gathering information from the company regarding how many women are currently employed in leadership in company x compared to the past.

Objective 2

'Discover why barriers may still be in place for women when it comes to having a career in the telecommunications industry?'

This will be informed through the literature review and interviews. (See appendix 1 for interview questions sheet.)

Objective 3

'Compare the highest level of education and skills between both genders in the telecommunication company and the level of possession in the company.'

This will be informed by determining the different levels of qualification the HR professionals have, comparing to their position in the company, and looking at their gender to see if there are any trends of difference between the different positions each gender holds.

Objective 4

'What initiatives are in place within the company to encourage women's progression in the company?'

The author will determine if company x has any initiatives for gender diversity. What initiatives are in place? Has the company had any success with said initiatives so far? Is there anything else the company can do?

Objective 5

'Determine if the company has any internal programs to help create a more gender-diverse company culture.'

The last objective is to see if the company has programs to help bring gender inclusivity into the business from the early days. The author wishes to determine if the employees are currently happy with their workplace culture through these programs, and if they feel there is anything else the company can do to improve this.

Structure of dissertation

Chapter 1 of this dissertation will introduce the research and outline the author's aims and objectives. Chapter 2 will review the literature discussing gender diversity and how it has progressed over the years, as well as discussing the barriers women face in the working world, and how an organisation can help women through programs and initiatives. In chapter 3, the researcher will outline the methodology approaches and how the author conducted their research. In Chapter 4, the findings will be examined and analysed. Chapter 5 discusses the research obtained. The last chapter will contain conclusions the researcher has drawn from the research and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature review:

Introduction

The purpose of the following is to investigate literature involving women in HR, as well as to investigate the role gender diversity plays in the industry of telecommunications. This will be explored further in a current workplace environment. It will help determine if an HR department can help a company create a gender-neutral working environment.

Gender diversity in ICT and how it changed

In recent years, women have been given more opportunities to advance their careers. The CSO (2019) reported that 63.7% of women were employed. Women in this field had grown immensely since the 1980s, when very few were employed. Before Ireland became a European Union member, women weren't allowed to work until married. This shows how much has changed in recent decades, as only a mere 20% of women were employed in those years (Bercholz and Fitzgerald, 2016).

The Celtic Tiger greatly influenced the progression of women's professional careers. Female employment levels rose, but post Celtic Tiger levels decreased again (Byrne and O'Brien, 2017). Research has found most women are in jobs that are *'middle of the road'*. The reasoning behind this can be the organization's fault, as its policies may leave little room for progression within a business (Cross and Linehan, 2006).

Studies have focused on women in technology-related fields over the years. Simard (2007) has discussed how IT companies have begun to look at how there is a lack of women in high-ranking positions. 2007 saw an increase in women in industries seen as 'male-dominated' (Raghuram, 2007). However, Ireland has 'gender imbalances' in technology and STEM-related fields (Chowdhury et al., 2021). The CSO (2019) reported that only one-third of Ireland's ICT employees are female. Their value chain analysis also said 28.6% of women were employed in the telecommunications sector in 2019 (CSO, 2019). Publications show that in the last ten years, there has been little change in women working in an ICT-related role. In 2012, women employed in IT-associated functions stood at 29% (CSO, 2012). To date, the percentage employed in ICT stands at 30% (CSO, 2019).

Despite all the talk surrounding progression for women within the ICT sector, it is of belief that it will still take '99.5 years to close gender gaps for women' (Dunne et al., 2022). ICT companies are now looking at their board regarding gender diversity, as there is an apparent lack of women in leadership roles (Kagzi and Guha, 2018). Previously, gender diversity statistics in the ICT industry weren't monitored. Changes had to be made, numbers were observed, and companies were looking for ways to improve diversity (Hafkin and Huyer, 2008).

Early education influences career advancements

According to Belingheri et al. (2021), education will allow people to progress further in their field. It is believed that not having a high level of education may hinder a woman's ability to move into a more executive role. It can be argued that the lack of ample opportunities for a female in an educational sense leads to barriers and few opportunities for their careers. Most literature only provides a slight view of educational barriers (Belingheri et al., 2021).

Education has a significant influence on the gender wage gap in skills and degrees. A higher level of education for a woman is said to be associated with lower pay, which is the opposite for men (Roethlisberger et al., 2022). The hiring of female staff coincides with the pay gap. This is due to them being a mother and having other responsibilities. (Belingheri et al., 2021).

Women with a college degree are more likely to have a career in an IT-related industry. This may be a barrier, from an educational perspective, as females are less likely to have decent exposure to IT in school due to a lack of female role models in STEM-related fields (Cheryan et al., 2017). These barriers come from *'cultural norms'* and societal barriers. Women can experience this from their own school experience and the influence of those around them. An example of this is women finding it difficult to balance work and family life, leading women to leave or put their careers on hold (Mullet, Rinn, and Kettler, 2017). This lack of interest in an IT career for girls at school can consciously or unconsciously arise, as they give themselves few opportunities due to a lack of influence from parents and teachers (Trauth and Connolly, 2021).

The number of women who have graduated with a college degree has increased worldwide (Mullet, Rinn, and Kettler, 2017). In 2016, 52.2% of college graduates in Ireland were

female. 23.4% of those females graduated in the business sector. In 2006, only 47.6% of women had a college degree. CSO reported that more women have a college degree compared to men (CSO, 2016). In technological courses, there were low levels of women. Numbers have gradually increased, with female employment rates increasing in certain sectors (Reddy, Adhikari, and Chitranshi, 2017). In 2019, 63.7% of women in Ireland were reported as employed, which has risen consistently since 2009 (CSO, 2019).

Feminist organisational theory

Wollstonecraft (1794) first spoke of feminist theory. The feminist organisational theory discusses how a company's business processes are created based on gender, race, and other inequalities (Hartley et al., 2019). The theory relates to issues already prevalent concerning power distribution in a company. It is used to develop an alternative way of doing things for a business. It allows for social change within a company (Benschop, 2021).

Technology is seen as a masculine role in a business sense. It is 'stereotypically' a role for a man, so women tend to stir away from it (Benschop, 2021). Women are vastly 'underrepresented' in a technological sense in certain companies. This leads to men still having a dominant role, and women are likely to quit their jobs in technology due to gender bias (Dias Canedo et al., 2019). Feminists have considered technology sectors highly *'gendered'* due to stereotypical technological products for males (Benschop, 2021).

Social role theory and gender stereotypes

Social role theory in terms of gender holds that men have the primary income in a family, with women being the homemaker. This stereotype believes men and women are unequal in society, which isn't the case. It is thought that gender stereotypes can be developed early regarding who a person's role model is and how they are raised (Gupta, Batra, and Gupta, 2022).

Some people suggest women have vastly different careers to men, due to men having fewer barriers. Although some women may have a reputable career and experience in the field, people may struggle to see this due to gender stereotypes. Therefore, they're reluctant to hire

them. The executive role stereotypically being a job for men is a significant barrier women face when they want to progress with their careers (Heilman, 2012).

Gender Bias

Previously, companies preferred to hire males regardless of how qualified they were for the job (Carli, 1999). Feminine processes were 'undervalued' within companies and rarely used. Introducing new technology into business meant more masculinity was added to everyday processes (Feeneya and Fusi, 2021). In 2017, a survey reported 43% of participants believed "unconscious bias" was a significant barrier for women looking to progress to boardroom level (IOD, 2019).

Gender bias has prevented females from progressing within a company (Issac, Lee, and Carnes, 2009). Women are naturally considered warmer than men. Due to this, people lack awareness of what a woman can achieve, leading to them being underappreciated (Reddy, Adhikari, and Chitranshi, 2017). The perception that a job is intended for a man can hinder a woman's ability to either apply for the job or get hired. Some positions may become biased due to a lack of interest from a male or female perspective (Reddy, Adhikari, and Chitranshi, 2017). Women are still considered less skilled in ICT (Farhat and Mijid, 2017).

Maternal responsibilities and work-life balance

Some businesses see women as the primary carer when raising their children. The concept of the maternal wall is the best way to describe this. A woman could have the most respected career until she becomes pregnant and her reputation can be questioned (Ferrante, 2018). According to a survey, around 30% of participants felt the mother should stay at home with their children. The maternal wall essentially gets in the way of a female working to overcome the glass ceiling (Ferrante, 2018). This leads to bosses being more likely to hire a male in a managerial role. Cross and Linehan (2006) found that some technological companies employ men who have never worked within the company for jobs, instead of promoting existing women.

Women's progression in telecommunications

Recently, females have progressed in industries like telecommunications or IT, as the world has progressed with recognition for both genders (Trauth and Connolly, 2021). Orange, a telecommunications company based in the UK, was one of the first companies to employ females (Orange, 2019). Since then, more companies have begun recruiting female staff in telecommunications. A diverse workforce of males and females is a substantial competitive advantage in the industry. (Molina et al., 2015).

Keniry (2019), Hay's director, has reported that women struggle to have a voice and be heard in the telecommunications industry, even though more females are now working in the sector. A mere 18.9% of IT specialists in Ireland are female, as reported in 2017. There is still a long way to go for women to gain equal recognition in the telecommunication sector (Reddy, Adhikari, and Chitranshi, 2017).

Factors of consideration for the career development

Knorr (2005) has found that an organisation's policy may heavily influence female career progression. To promote the advancement of women within an organisation, a company must look at its policies and determine if they are equal to both males and females. A clear organisational policy can be vital to achieving equality (Knorr, 2005).

It is at the hands of the company to create a working environment where everyone feels valued and comfortable. Examples include an organisation implementing a *'work-family program'*. Most mothers feel they can't work after having children, due to decades of women giving up their jobs to stay at home. Today, that's not the case. It just takes a company to create a policy or back-to-work program, or to bring in 'childcare' facilities for women or even men who have responsibilities to their children (Knorr, 2005).

Career progression is arguably biased towards men.The usual 'family-friendly' policies in an organisation have been directed mainly towards women, leading to career breaks when they have children. This leaves senior-level jobs open for more males within an organisation. Even if a woman doesn't have children, it seems most policies are typically against women (Mavin, 2001).

Research shows most policies within a company are either unreliable or unusable. It proves that strategic human resource models do not reference organizational diversity (Martín Alcazar, Miguel Romero Fernández, and Sánchez Gardey, 2013). It appears that mainly men are in management jobs in telecommunication companies. Businesses have tried to change their policies to be more equal, with some success. This shows how companies can change their policies to be more inclusive, which will help create a diversified workforce (Appelbaum, Asham, and Argheyd, 2011).

Training programs

Companies lack training programs to ensure women have equal opportunities to progress as men (Domenico and Jones, 2007). Training programs must be altered to suit both men's and women's leadership styles (Jonsen, Maznevski, and Schneider, 2010). This will allow them to better understand progression routes for everyone within the relevant companies. Having access to a good training program allows employees to perform to an efficient standard at a corporate level (Aguinis and Kraiger, 2009). A tailored business training program to suit both genders will allow a company to create a more diverse workforce in which both parties are highly skilled. This will benefit both the company and the employees (Knorr, 2005).

Barriers faced by women

Progression routes have been perceived to be more challenging for women. Women face many barriers to career development. These include a lack of role models (Simard, 2007), the fear of promotions (Devillard, Hunt and Yee, 2018), parental leave (Chester and Kleiner, 2001), and lack of gender diversity (Reed and Buddeberg-Fischer, 2008).

Role models

Good role models and support networks are significant factors that can either help or hinder a woman's career. A good role model from early on will benefit women, as it allows them to build their self-esteem. (Newmarch, Taylor-Steele, and Cumpston, 2000).

From an early age, a person relies on advice from people around them. This advice may either help or hinder the career path they choose to pursue (Payne, 2014). In the IT industry, there aren't many women to aspire to be or look up to (Ahuja, 1995). When children are younger, the video games they play are usually more targeted towards boys/males, which leads to a reluctance for young girls to play them, which means they are less likely to take computer or technology classes (Mou and Peng, 2009).

Mentoring positively correlates with increased female involvement and improves their performance. Having a mentor as a positive role model for women within an organisation, and gives them the confidence to progress in their careers (Tardos and Paksi, 2018). CIPD (2015) discusses how mentoring is a great way to improve skills and mindset. As well, mentoring female colleagues has had a positive correlation with the support of females and their progression within their careers (CIPD, 2015).

Reluctance to seek rewards and promotions

Women are stereotypically less likely to try to get promotions or ask for bonuses (Devillard, Hunt, and Yee, 2018). In the past, men were more likely to receive rewards. This has since changed. Technology companies have realised that the best way to recognise their employees is to promote the most deserving. More women being promoted will improve gender integration (Simard, 2007). Companies that offer promotions and diversity policies are 'more innovative' and reduce employee turnover (Ellemers and Rink, 2016).

Introduction of parental leave

Previously, it became the mother's job to give up work when she has children. Companies have introduced paternity leave to allow fathers to have paid leave too. This will make women feel more equal in the workplace and enable flexibility (Farre, 2016). As set out in the Parental Leave Act (1998), amended in 2019, both parties are entitled to the same amount of parental leave of 26 weeks. However, the CSO (2020) reported only *'3.1 per 100 employees'* of men took paternity leave in 2019 (CSO, 2020).

Gender discrimination

Previous research has stated that the main reason women had little progression in their careers compared to men is their gender (Simard, 2007). Research shows while women may

have the same career goals as men, they have more barriers due to their gender (Reed and Buddeberg-Fischer, 2008). These barriers still appear because of past ideas of 'cultural norms' related to gender inequality (Abalkhail, 2017). To achieve a diverse workforce, it has been argued that the organisation must alter policies and procedures to coincide with gender diversity advancements and achieve 'best practice' (Coe, Wiley, and Bekker, 2019). Previously, the media stereotypically categorises women in terms of technology. They state women hold little power in the technological sector. This can affect a woman's willingness to apply for a job in this sector (Cozza, 2011).

Discussions around diversity within organisations

Studies state only 24% of women have a job in the computing industry. It is found that mainly men are hired for tech roles. Women only make up around 17% of leaders in the IT industry. Women in IT are the lowest percentage of any other industry (Atal, Berenguer, and Borwanker, 2019).

Gender diversity has become a aspect of growth and is considered a 'priority' for most organisations (Kaur and Arora, 2020). Many companies have adopted such changes that have positively affected the company's work culture. Telecommunication companies Vodafone and Sky were named in the Top 50 companies that employ women by the Times in 2020 (The Times, 2020). They believe that promoting gender diversity in an organisation helps towards *'holistic growth and success'* (Kaur and Arora, 2020).

Companies have improved promoting initiatives to create a more gender-diverse organisation. These include setting gender-diverse policies. Promoting inclusivity in the business will allow businesses to sustain their gender diversity (Warren et al., 2019). There is still little research to suggest whether gender equality initiatives have been successful in diversifying organisations. Increased gender equality policies help an organisation reduce its 'Glass Ceiling Index' (Tardos and Paksi, 2018). A study in Australia stated that 200 companies set diversity targets at board room level. These targets increased between 2011-2021, with one-third of females now at the boardroom level in these companies (Kulik, 2022).

Gender pay gap

Kaur and Arora (2020) have also reported that a significant factor in resolving gender equality issues is to close the gender pay gap. Countries have made excellent progress towards closing the gap in recent years. The WEF's Global Gender Pay Gap Report (2021) reports Western Europe has progressed the most, at 77.6%, a slight progression from 2020 of 76.7%. Ireland is 9 in the top 10 countries reported in 2021 to have closed their gender gap at 80%. The same report stated that only 30.3% of employees in telecommunications were women in 2019 (WEF, 2021).

IBEC (2018) maintains that all businesses must disclose how much they pay each staff member. Reporting salaries allows companies to monitor male and female pay differences. Even though this is a significant intervention, nothing is set in stone to help resolve issues regarding women being paid less for the same levels of work (Ibec, 2018).

Educational barriers:

In 2020, the CSO Educational Attainment Thematic Report found that women with the lowest level of education, primary school, are less likely to be employed than those with a college degree, with only 24% employed. (CSO, 2020).

Fox (2016) believes it can be as simple as setting up training programs to upskill females. Education is a significant barrier that leads to fewer women joining such industries.

King's Business School in London has tried to tackle gender issues. They have introduced a class that educates their students on gender inclusiveness in the workplace. It aims to try and eliminate gender barriers in the workplace (Murray, 2022).

How can companies promote roles to women?

Sometimes, for the successful promotion of women, a company must look at some government interventions. The promotion of such policies may be fundamental to the success of a more diversified company. The OECD report of gender recommendations discusses policies that will help companies achieve gender equality. The goal is to ensure women keep

their jobs even after having children. This is done through the promise of paid leave. This should be available to men and women (OECD, 2020).

The OECD has supported women in their pay and job security. They have implemented policies to give females the confidence to progress to leadership roles. A diverse leadership board allows women to feel more comfortable in such roles. The OCED has a few policies that help promote women in management-level positions. These include companies targets for more women on the board and rules for the *"disclosure of gender make-up"* of a company's board's policies (OECD, 2020).

Conclusion

This chapter aimed to review relevant literature around gender diversity in the telecommunications industry to determine if there are still barriers women may face when entering said industries, as well as to find out if a company's HR department can help combat gender diversity.

On reflection, females working in the telecommunications industry have improved slightly. It is essential to note that theories surrounding gender diversity have enabled women to feel comfortable in the workplace. Such theories include feminist organisational theory (Hartley et al., 2019).

Women have become more prominent in the working world. However, women and men still don't equally take parental leave. The Parental Leave Act 2019 says both parties are entitled to equal parental leave.

Recognition of females has improved, but more progress is needed through new initiatives and support of company programs. With companies developing career pathways for females in the preceding decade, progress has been slow. Online data shows little female progress has been made in ICT.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this research is to find out whether women have been employed and pursued careers in the telecommunications industry, and to determine whether human resources initiatives and programs implemented in an organization allow women to move forward with the industry.

The research presented intends to evaluate a range of conclusions within the telecommunications industry. Organisations must adopt initiatives to ensure gender diversity. However, according to the study, there is yet to be an initiative that creates an entire diversified industry for both genders (Kaur and Arora, 2020).

The methodology will contain a summary of each research approach. It will also outline what research method was used to draw conclusions for the objectives of said research question. The author will lay out the differences between each research approach. Discussions will then be made regarding the primary and secondary research conducted to show the differences between both types of research. The rationale behind the study will also be discussed, and any ethical considerations surrounding the investigation. The author must ensure everything is done correctly for the research paper to be ethical. Lastly, the author will discuss any limitations in the execution of a dissertation and refer to the limitations/challenges the researcher faced throughout the research process.

For the research, the researcher mainly interviewed people from the Irish head office. To determine if the change has been made within the company in other parts of the world, the author interviewed someone within the company's HR department in the UK. The interview process was mainly structured. However, the researcher asked for follow-ups during individual interviews where necessary. They were then given a consent form to read before the interviews, and an explanation of what the interviews would look like. They were informed that all discussions would be voice recorded for the research write-up, and all information obtained would be completely anonymous and confidential.

Research strategy adopted

The researcher needs to analyse each research method to determine which type best suits the research being conducted. The three research methodologies a researcher usually considers are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (David et al., 2018).

Qualitative research

Qualitative research is gathered by the researcher getting first-hand information through interviews or focus groups (Turner et al., 2021). Most methods used in qualitative research are face-to-face. Qualitative research allows a researcher to use question to get a person's thoughts on a topic. This may allow a participant to discuss their past, or just give their opinions (Sutton and Austin, 2015).

It involves the gathering of large amounts of information. The information must be recorded, so the researcher can '*transcribe*' the data. The information can be documented through notetaking, video, or audio recording. The transcribing itself can be a time-consuming process. The researcher may use notes and video/audio tape to get the most out of the information (Sutton and Austin, 2015).

Grossoehme (2014) has argued qualitative research is unreliable. The researcher may influence opinions during the gathering of information, as they decide what questions they are asking to try and come to a hypothesis. This isn't necessarily a negative aspect. It may '*enhance*' the research (Grossoehme, 2014).

The researcher felt a qualitative research method was the most appropriate form of research to conduct for said paper. It was thought it was the best way to gather the information needed by interviewing HR professionals in a telecommunications company. The researchers knew they could use their questions to gather data from a small group of people.

Quantitative Research

Quantitative research allows a researcher to *'analyse variables and quantify them'* to conclude their results. This is done through the interpretation of *'numerical data'* to answer the questions needed for their research (Apuke, 2017). Such analysis may be collected through surveys. Quantitative research best suits a paper using statistics and data collection (Watson, 2015). It has been argued that quantitative data only gathers a small amount of

information and will not help with *"in-depth analyses"*. Quantitative research is far less time-consuming than qualitative research (Rahman, 2016).

A weakness of quantitative research is that it only captures opinions from a person and may not get the views over a longer period. It also doesn't consider where a person gets their opinions from. Essentially, it disregards how people's thoughts and actions are maintained by the people surrounding them and their role models (Rahman, 2016).

The author decided against using a quantitative approach, as even though you could get a larger sample size, the information that can be gathered has fewer details. As most information collected is numerical, the author wouldn't get a real insight into the interviewee's feelings and thoughts on the subject.

Mixed Methods

Alternatively, some researchers adopt a mixed method approach involving qualitative and quantitative methods to help with research outcomes. It leaves fewer *'restrictions'* for the research. This method can be beneficial; however, it may be difficult for the researcher to connect both methods or discuss how they may relate (Doyle, Brady, and Byrne, 2009).

Even though it can be hard to link the two together, it allows the researcher to delve deeper and gain a 'richer insight' into their research topic without missing any critical details (Caruth, 2013). Over the years, mixed method research has become more popular. It allows an author to increase strengths within their study and decrease weaker areas (Cook et al., 2019).

The author considered adopting a mixed method approach by conducting both a survey and an interview. However, they decided against it. A mixed method approach wasn't used, as the author felt that doing both would be time-consuming and more challenging to clarify the results.

Research design approach with participants

A qualitative method was chosen for the author's research. It consisted of a semi-structured interview involving six participants. The participants consisted of HR professionals from a multinational telecommunication company. The author interviewed four females and two males to gain insight from both demographics.

When looking at past research papers on gender diversity in a workplace, it was determined that a qualitative method was the most appropriate. A study done by Soldan and Nankervis

(2014) on diversity in work determined that conducting a qualitative approach allows the researcher to go more in-depth. It will enable you to gain better insights into a company's gender diversity policies, which the researchers felt was needed for this study (Soldan and Nankervis, 2015).

The participants were randomly selected, with help from the company's HR department. Various interviews were conducted with Irish team members and an employee from their international team in the UK. Due to the new restrictions since the COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews were chosen to be conducted online through Microsoft teams.

Interviewing males and females was a vital aspect of the research, as it was necessary to help answer the objectives of said research. Gaining insight from male and female participants can help discover different opinions on the topic. This company has many females in various roles within the organisation, so getting ideas from a diverse company in specific departments was interesting.

All participants were protected during this process, and their identities will be kept anonymous by the researcher. Information from the interviews will be relayed without disclosing participants' personal details. Before the process began, discussions were had with the company's HR business partner about the dissertation and asking for permission for the interviews. The sample size was chosen based on different levels of people within the company's HR department, as well as a representative from a male in leadership and a representative from the company's diversity and inclusion department. Most of the sample consisted of female participants with two male representatives to get various opinions. It ranged from people working in HR to employees in leadership positions. Each interviewee has worked in the industry for 20+ years. Each interview took 25 - 30 minutes, and was voice recorded and kept in a secure folder. An introductory email was sent to all interviewees before the interviews to inform participants of the purpose of the research.

Data procedure adopted

For this research, primary and secondary data collection was used. Using both methods allow the researcher to compare deferring pieces of information (Ruggiano and Perry, 2019). Primary data was collected by interviewing six participants in a multinational telecommunications company. The secondary data was obtained through online research using academic journals and metrics from the telecommunications company.

Primary data research

The primary data used for this research paper was to interview six male and female employees of an Irish telecommunications company online through Microsoft Teams, including some employees from their UK head office. This process was chosen because it felt the most fitting for said research. Interviews can be held in person and over the phone with the same outcomes. It enables the author to ask probing questions to get the best response for their research (Block and Erskine, 2012). Each interview was recorded on a mobile phone and then placed on a secure laptop, so the data could be correctly interpreted for the write-up and notes being taken., Each recording and notes were destroyed after completing the write-up. Participants were aware of note-taking and recordings.

Secondary data research

Secondary data research was also collected to add richness and give more depth to the study by the author. This was collected in peer-reviewed academic journals and data from the interviewees about the telecommunications company. This research was done to help the author reach the objectives wanted for said research. Data from the telecommunications company was based on company programs and initiatives to combat gender diversity to determine if the company is growing in terms of gender year on year. Data were reviewed from articles based on the progression of gender diversity within the industry. The primary data for the interview questions were based on the findings and objectives.

Rationale for research design

The reason for adopting a qualitative approach to research design was that the author felt it was the most appropriate for the paper in question. It allows the interviewer to probe questions (Britten, 1995). Qualitative research gives more 'rigour' to the study. It has been used to answer the researchers' objectives. The researcher must try to eliminate bias from their research and not influence the interviewees. This may be done by not using any questions which could be leading. Interviews are easier to modify based on the research in question. Using open-ended questions can help the researcher determine the credibility of the participant (Johnson et al., 2020). Choosing a qualitative approach allows the research to gather first-hand company metrics from those employed by the company and determine the

initiatives to help combat gender diversity and if they are working. Getting the information first-hand allows the researcher to gain richer insight.

Ethical considerations

It is essential throughout the dissertation process that all interviewees' personal information is kept anonymous, as well as protecting the identity of the multinational telecommunications company. All participants must know the reasoning behind the research in question and what the researcher is looking to determine. The participants must give the researcher consent to participate in interviews and support for their answers to be stored for a particular time for the research (Doyle et al., 2022).

Ethical guidelines were followed before the research was conducted. The researcher contacted the company's HR business partner to get permission to conduct the interview. Details on the interview were shared with the interviewees regarding the research being carried out and a consent form before they took part in the interview process. Once the interviewees confirmed they wanted to part-take, an email with timeslots was sent to each of them so they could choose a suitable time for their interview. It was reiterated the interviews were voluntary, and each person could either back out at any stage or decide not to answer specific questions. All policies by NCI have been followed by receiving the consent form and information about the interview and what it will involve. The notes and audio recordings will be deleted when the dissertation results are given. All participants have been made aware of this.

For confidentiality, transcripts from the interview have not been disclosed in said dissertation as they may identify participants. These discussions were made as a basis of research to discover their highest level of education and how far they have come in their career.

Limitations of research

Every research paper will encounter some sort of difficulty or limitation. When using qualitative research, you must remember to stay unbiased when choosing participants. It is best to select participants randomly (Tuckett, 2004). The author must remain neutral so it doesn't lead to 'Sample-frame bias,' sampling people to reach the study's objectives. The author sent out an email to a variety of people within said company, with the head of the hr business partner, instead of selecting them themself (Tuckett, 2004). All types of research have positives and negatives. The limitations of qualitative research are it is more time-

consuming in comparison to other types of research. However, even though it is a timelier approach, qualitative research may allow the author to gather richer data. This will be more beneficial in the long run (Lang et al., 2022).

It may also be noted that qualitative research is based on relativism, making it difficult for the researcher to find the truth. Gathering truthful information is imperative for the researcher to develop their paper. Sometimes employees in high-power organisations are afraid to tell the whole truth in interviews. The topic of inclusivity of both genders can be a difficult one. (Munthe- Kaas et al., 2019). For said research paper, the author is aware that some questions may be difficult to answer as they may feel uncomfortable doing so or may not honestly answer the questions.

Digital interviews appear to be a new way forward ever since the covid-19 pandemic. Thunberg and Arnell (2021) have argued this new form of using online communication has led to what is known as a *'new digital revolution'*. Even though these online forms of communicating aren't entirely new, they were never used the same. Digital interviews make life easier for all parties involved. Even though interviews online are easier, no research proves it is a good form of communication for probing questions. It can also lead to communication being delayed due to connectivity. Limitations also include sometimes the interviewer forgets to use words like 'hmm' or 'I see.' This will let the interviewee know they're being listened to (De Villiers, Farooq, and Molinari, 2021). It may also be argued that face-to-face interviews are more effective for sensitive topics, which is the topic of this research paper. The data gathered/ audio recordings may be affected negatively by not being as clear (Thunberg and Arnell, 2021). During the interviews, one audio became interrupted as the network connection kept dropping for participant 6. For this reason, the researcher had to rely on notes primarily.

The author also faced limitations while setting up the interviews as many people working for said company were on annual leave throughout the time and it wasn't easy to get in touch with others. Miscommunication in the agreement of dates for the interviews led to delays in the process.

A pilot study was not conducted. Research has shown pilot studies can lead to a researcher picking up negative, unclear results (Moore et al., 2011). However, If the researcher conducted a pilot study, it would have allowed for efficiency. The researcher had never been

interviewed for research before this. The pilot would have helped the author gain experience and allowed for better development of the questions (Moore et al., 2011).

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, the author has presented the reasoning behind choosing a qualitative research method to form their research objectives. The problem presented in this dissertation is whether there has been progression within the telecommunication industry for women over the years. The primary and secondary research conducted helps to form the argument and make discussions as to whether HR departments can help with the progression within the industry by having gender diversity initiatives. Ethical considerations were used like consent forms, getting permission from the hr business partner, and letting the participants know their rights during the process.

Chapter 4: Research Analysis and Findings:

Introduction

The purpose of this section is to interpret the information collected during the structured interviews with people in a multinational telecommunications company. The interviewees ranged from males and females who are employed in the People Development Department, a female employee from the UK whose job is to oversee diversity and inclusion in the UK and Ireland, the Chief Peoples Officer, the Head of Learning and Development, and Head of Business Partnering and Project Management. Throughout this section, the researcher will use quotes from the interviews to ease the reader. The interviewees were asked 12 questions, some containing follow-up questions. During this section, the author will interpret the questions asked to answer each objective. In the following section, the author will refer to the multinational telecommunications company as Company X.

Throughout the interview process, the researcher noticed some themes came up. Other interviewees lacked knowledge in the area and some of their answers didn't give the whole picture.

The multinational company gives an engagement survey to all employees twice a year. The survey contains questions allowing employees to elaborate on whether their voice is heard. The engagement survey is relevant for research as company X uses the study to enable all employees to voice their opinions and concerns regarding how the company is currently running and if they can do anything to improve. It includes questions based on gender diversity and workplace culture.

Leaders are confident the HR department can help drive the changes needed to improve gender diversity. However, they feel more needs to be done before they can start to see a difference. The company currently has a good mix of staff, but all the interviewees mentioned how they believe there should be more females on the board.

They use metrics to determine the number of company male and female representatives at different levels. Targets are to reach a 50/50 split by 2030 in their Dublin Head Office. They also monitor the number of males and females at each company level throughout their office. This is relevant for research as it shows how the telecommunications company is aware that more needs to be done to allow more females to progress and is starting to make changes for the better.

66% of the interviewees believed maternity leave is still a big topic of discussion and should be equal for both men and women as it is often left solely up to the women. This is relevant for the research as maternity leave is a significant barrier for women in terms of progression. Taking time out of work can affect a woman's stance within the company and lead to them falling behind compared to a male colleague, as mentioned by participant 1 during the interviews.

Research objective 1

Research objective one was to determine if telecommunication companies have progressed in the last ten years and become more gender diverse.

Relevant themes:
- Even though there is room for further improvements, over the past ten years, there has been significant improvements with the number of male and females employed within the telecommunication company.
- The use of metrics to improve the number of women in the company, with targets for an equal split in 2030, improvements still need to be made, but they are on the right track to see a total change.

Over the years, company X has made significant improvements, but there is still much more to be made. They have set plans to have a 50/50 split at board room level by 2030 and across the board. Currently, the company has 36% of women in leadership level in Ireland and 32% of women within leadership in the UK. This has improved slightly in the last five years as in 2017, there were 29% of women employed in leadership. The company stands at 45% females. Progression is being made slowly with the company, and a lot of work needs to be done so they can see improvements by 2030. Ten years ago, the company didn't monitor women and men at different levels in technology roles. Therefore, they had no statistics for this year. They said it had not changed much, consistent with research conducted with women in ICT standing at around 30% (CS0, 2019).

100% of the participants discussed how they believe their target is reachable as the company never makes commitments unless they think they can reach them. The company has a big

focus on improving gender diversity. The participants mentioned over the last decade there have been slight improvements with room to improve further.

"At a HR perspective there are mainly females however, in technology areas of the business males are still the majority" Participant 6 (Female).

Other participants discussed how the lack of focus on gender diversity led to slow changes in certain departments.

"There have been changes in certain business areas, not others. In HR numbers are high however, there hasn't been much change to date as there was no focus" Participant 4 (Female).

With the change in focus, 100% of the participants believe the targets will be met.

"The company wouldn't put out these targets if they didn't believe they could be met" Participant 3 (Male).

Monitoring through metrics

Company x will focus on monitoring the progression over the next 8 years by looking at the number of people at the boardroom and leadership level yearly. They don't know how they will measure it. However, they have a plan for how they will implement these goals. Recruiter education will be introduced to ensure a fair selection process. Progress will be measured by comparisons in company functions versus population. They will revise their targets in 2025 to see if they are progressing toward their goal in 2030.

"We look at the numbers of people. Females are 51% of the population in Ireland and at leadership there are 36% and overall, it is 45%" Participant 1 (Female).

Conclusion

In the last five years, the number of women in leadership positions within company x has only improved by 7%. There is still a lot of work for the company to reach 50% by 2030. However, the company now focuses on achieving that goal, whereas in the past, it didn't. All participants believe this focus will help make a difference and allow the company to reach their target. Limitations for said goal may include the company not having a set plan as to how they will monitor year on year. They are looking at the numbers but must ensure they put this in writing to see the change.

Research Objective 2

Discover why barriers may still exist for women when it comes to having a career in the telecommunications industry.

Relevant Themes:

- Parental leave should be mandatory for both genders.
- There could be more women role models throughout the business at boardroom level
- The gender pay gap is still prevalent in the telecommunications industry, and little is being done about it.

Women still face barriers in their careers compared to males.

Throughout the interviews, it was evident that all interviewees felt there are still barriers women face in their career journey. Respondents made it clear they believe changes still need to be made in areas such as parental leave and the gender pay gap. The interviewees were asked if, in their opinion, women still face any barriers in their career journey, if they have faced any different treatment in terms of their career, and they have faced any obstacles. The following was gathered from the respondent's answers.

Parental leave and how it should be equal

Participant 1 believes parental leave is still not equal, and if a woman goes on maternity leave, her career may be affected. Historically, it was up to the women to look after the child after birth, but that changed. 66% of the participants touched on maternity leave and how it can hinder a woman's career due to her taking so much time out of work. They felt it should be shared between the parties involved, if possible.

"Men don't take paternity leave for long enough. A woman and a man could graduate in the same year and start in a company simultaneously. In the first 2-5 years of their career, women progress more than men. Then the woman gets pregnant and goes on

maternity leave. When she comes back, that same man she was ahead of has progressed even further than her" Participant 1 (Female).

"Taking 6-9 months or a year out of your career is a massive challenge. I came in to cover someone from maternity leave who was out for a year, and I have been chatting to her since she came back and she is finding it difficult to get back into it. Things move so fast you are nearly starting again. I think it would be so much nicer to be able to take 3 months and then the other person takes 3 months or whatever suits both careers. That flexibility would be key to levelling the playing field" Participant 2 (Male).

Unfortunately, despite significant progress in recent years, barriers may still affect a woman's career path, forcing her to play catch up. Maternity leave seems to be a common factor with 66% of participants believing maternity leave should be shared and become more equal, so a woman isn't forced to feel as though she is massively behind on her career journey.

A significant factor that can affect a person's career during pregnancy or parenthood is the opinion of those around them. In recent years within company X, this has changed and progressed. Participant 4 believes in hiring the best person for the role regardless of the circumstances. They stated in their old jobs that were not always the philosophy held. Still, within company x, they believe it is only fair to give women on maternity leave equal opportunities.

"When you go away and have a baby its always difficult…

If you can hire the right person for the role, they are worth waiting for. One of my team members started with us when she was six months pregnant and we told her she is the right person for the team, and she was still here. When they are away on maternity leave, if there are any new job opportunities, we always allow them to step in at any stage if they wish" Participant 4 (Female)

Reflecting upon the statements made by the participants about maternity leave, it can be determined even though progress has been made over the years; women still appear to take more extended parental leave than men. Company X has made progress with this so that women don't fall entirely behind. They even have put in place opportunities for women to progress within their career when they are out on maternity leave. During the interviews, participant 5 discussed how they were promoted twice during their time off on

maternity leave which backed up what participant 4 stated. Conclusions may be drawn that having a company that believes in progression and equality opens doors for people even if they are on maternity leave. It is up to companies themselves to enforce this.

Role models in high-ranking positions within Company X

One significant barrier that seems to be common is a lack of women role models at board room level, which means women have no one to aspire to.

The company does appear to have a decent number of women within the HR department. Still, as mentioned by some interviewees, the number of women in other business areas is lacking. Plans are in place to see this change by 2030; however, presently, it seems as though there are not many women role models. The only high-ranking female appears to be the head of L&D. Other than that, males dominate the boardrooms.

"We haven't had a focus on it to date. From a HR perspective there is a high number of females, but across other areas of the business no. I think it is so important we are starting this work now because we want to see change there" Participant 4 (Female).

Participant 4 discussed how other business areas still lack women in leadership. They discussed how there are loads of women who have stepped up to be mentors and those wanting to be mentees to women in the business, however, most of these are not at senior level as women at this level are still lacking.

Participant 3 stated even though they don't think there is a lack of role models, there could always be more in the company. They discussed how Company X supported a campaign with role models and how they believe seeing women in senior roles is essential. Even though company X has several examples of women role models, they still need more. Participant 6 discussed how there are many women within the HR department, but apart from that, there is a lack of women within other departments leaving little room for women role models.

"The tag line essentially was you can't be who you can't see….

That piece around the importance of having role models and having women see other women in senior roles is hugely important." Participant 3 (Male).

After interviewing all participants, they all believe there is still a lack of female role models within the company. They discussed how the boardroom is still male-heavy and there is no more room for new senior roles. It appears women won't be able to progress further unless someone leaves. The company has plans for a 50/50 split at the senior level for 2030. These new plans in place show the company is ready for real change to be made.

Discussions around the gender pay gap.

Surprisingly, the gender pay gap wasn't discussed majorly during the interviews. However, 80% of the participants agreed it is still in place and something should happen to change it. Participant 1 stated the pay gap is *'unfortunately still there'*. Participant 4 said it has become better than it was and discussed how they read somewhere the world won't be gender equal with their pay for 100 years. The consensus is the pay gap is still in place, and they all agree it shouldn't be. Salaries are still secretive when it comes to job listings. Women have become so used to the gender pay gap that they don't feel it significantly hinders their careers.

"I think all salaries shouldn't be secrets. I think everyone's salaries should be posted with job listings"—participant 2 (Male).

"There are still pay gap issues… it's frightening," Participant 4 (Female).

Different treatment women face compared to men.

When interviewees were asked to discuss if they had faced any different treatment throughout their career, the males' answers were utterly different from the females. The male interviewees answered with a brief no they haven't.

Participant 2 mentioned that the only thing that could lead him to *'treated differently did not have a master's degree'*. The different treatment women have received is apparent. Participant 4 discussed how people have made comments over the years regarding how they dressed and about not putting in work after returning from maternity leave.

Similarly, participant 1 said people would make comments after they had their baby and decided to become part-time. They would say things like *"nice of you to show up"* or

comments about them arriving late and leaving early. This reiterates how hard it can be for women after they have a baby and must balance their work life with parenthood. However, they stated now this has changed, and comments aren't made now. This shows how much progression has been made over the years compared to the awful treatment women faced in the past.

Limitations and implications

The discussions with the participants around maternity leave are consistent with the findings in the literature review as it shows women are still more likely to take a longer parental leave compared to a man (Ferrante, 2018).

The results are clear there is still an extreme lack of female role models within the company. This is consistent with the author's discussion on the lack of female role models within the IT industry (CSO, 2007). Limitations of this may include that there is no room for more board members. Female staff will have to wait until a board member leaves to try and progress.

These findings are integral as it is on the organisation to look at their headcount and how they can make it more balanced. Company x has a lot of work to do to reach its target of a 50/50 split by 2030 as they have a plan in place for this, they are on the right track.

The results show there are still significant issues with the gender pay gap in Ireland, and it is up to the company to change this if it is not going to be changed. Information gathered from the interviews suggests pay is still an important issue for women in the working world. Women still aren't being rewarded for their achievements the same way men are, which shows the lack of equality. Implications of the pay gap make it difficult for women to earn a fair wage. As these wages aren't posted before application, as mentioned by participant 2, it is hard for women to know if they are going to be paid fairly.

Consistently to research, women are treated differently than men in the working world. Progression has shown this has changed. All interviewees stated they are happy with their working culture. Companies must enforce a positive working culture in which everyone feels comfortable, allowing them to retain their staff. 66% said they would not work there if they weren't happy with the culture.

Conclusion

Women still face many barriers in terms of their careers. They are falling behind in their careers due to maternity leave. Companies need to change this. There is still a lack of role models at the senior level within Company X. They have their target for 2030 to improve their board with 50/50 split, which means there is still little role models until then. The pay gap is still an important topic of discussion, leaving the women staff underappreciated for their work. Treatment of women employees has improved for the better in recent years.

Research Objective 3

Compare the highest level of education between both genders and their level of position within the company.

Relevant themes:

- Not everyone had a degree. 66% of the participants discussed how they 'fell' into their career path by accident regardless of gender.
- All the interviewees have 14+ years of experience and have progressed through different areas over the years they gained experience.
- There is still a lack of women mentors in high-ranking positions within the business

Educational background and how they got into their career

The first question each participant was asked to discuss their educational experience and how they landed into their job. 66% of the participants ended up in the telecommunications industry by accident.

Participant 1 discussed how they are now in their 3rd career in this current role. They have a degree; however, it is nothing to do with telecommunications or business. They initially worked in TV production, which led them to notice that many women were employed in this industry. This allowed them to transfer their skills and use them to their advantage by starting in a project management role in company X. When they started company X, they noticed a lack of females and diversity within the business. As a result, they got involved with diversity, but the company had no 'diversity inclusion agenda' back then. From an HR perspective participant 1 felt the company had to make a significant change.

Similarly, participant 2 and participant 4 don't have any degrees. They fell into their career accidentally by working their way up and through different companies. Participant 2, male, made it clear there is little room for progression in company x. They discussed the one manager above them is female; however, there aren't any other female mentors for their female colleagues.

Participant 4, a female, has worked her way up to manage the learning and developing team without a degree. Both participants have been working in the telecommunications industry for 20+ years. The female participant has made it further than the male. The male has mentioned how he is ready to progress, but there is no room for movement, which has presented a challenge for both genders. Participant 2 also said that most telecommunication companies look for a degree or master's degree when hiring new staff.

Women in high-ranking positions

Reflecting upon the interviews, company X shows they have become more gender diverse as Participant 4 is in a high-ranking leadership role; there is only one woman above her, so changes still need to be made. However, Participant 5 discussed how many women are now employed in HR, yet at the leadership level, it seems to have mainly males in high-ranking positions. This means there are few female mentors in higher places other than general HR roles. Company X has set a target and plans to change this by 2030.

"We have got mostly men in management roles, for example, where we are now trying to get more balance in that space" Participant 5 (Female).

Participant 3, currently the Chief People Officer within Company X, discussed how his highest level of education is a master's in human resources, which he feels has benefitted him in his career journey. He reports directly to the CEO, who is also male. He has been working in his professional career for the past 26 years. When asked if there have been enough females in high-ranking positions, the participant stated there need to be more women in higher ranking roles.

"So much of what we can do is to increase the number of women leaders in our business will encourage the number of role models so you can have that good balance" Participant 3 (Male).

The participant also stated how at a macro level, the company is 49% female and 51% male; however, the company is still *"skewed"* in some functions. The technology departments are

mainly males. In recent years, the company has had more women within the HR departments than men. Company X has several women mentors, but there needs to be more. The company is aware of this and is looking to see how they can increase the number of women in their executive roles by asking the recruitment team to work on it. Company X always try to ensure they have equal candidates in terms of gender for senior leadership roles to assess who is the right person.

"At the executive team level, it is not a balanced team in terms of gender, and there is no driver. I think some of that is historical. There has been little movement at executive level which leaves little room for opportunities" Participant 3 (Male).

Conclusion

There is no correlation between gender and progression within the company. Both genders seem to have similar opportunities, with some having college degrees and others having no. Even though this is not a problem now, Participant 2 suggests this could affect people in future circumstances. However, research suggests that having an educational background does help a person to progress further, which is consistent with the CPO being the only interviewee with a master's degree in HR. (Belingheri et al., 2021).

Research Objective 4

What initiatives are in place to combat the issue of gender diversity and how are they measured?

Relevant themes:

- Target to reach a 50/50 split of gender within the leadership teams so the company can become gender diverse. This initiative was known by 100% of the participants.
- DIB committee has initiatives to educate their workforce so they can hire the correct people while trying to keep it gender balanced.

Initiatives

Diverse workforce

Company X has several plans in place to help combat the issue of gender diversity. During the interviews, all participants were asked if they were aware of any initiative to gauge whether the company is making these known to all their employees.

Company X has plans in place, as discussed, to reach a gender balance in leadership roles by 2030. Each leadership team is focusing on three areas to help with this change.

"This is now an ELT initiative, and I have been going around and talking to each leadership team about what they are going to do about it," Participant 1 (Female).

Company X is focusing on three areas within this initiative. Those areas are flexible and hybrid working, looking at their company's gender policies and rewards to allow women to progress so they can feel comfortable doing so and driving the increased representation of women to help improve areas, i.e., the gender pay gap. Given both males and females, flexible working opportunities allow for flexibility for people with families. Encourage men to as well is a big help in keeping everything equal. Company X also brought in some new diversity and inclusion principles which is essential as they are bringing in a lot of change.

"The more women we have in leadership, the better our gender pay gap will be," Participant 1 (Female).

As mentioned, the company conducts an engagement survey twice a year to engage with their employees and allow them to voice any concerns. This survey focuses on how the company can improve all employees' experiences. The survey also allows the company to measure said initiatives to determine if progress is being made. It is entirely confidential and allows staff to voice their concerns. This engagement survey allows the company to measure if employees are happy with their workplace culture and see improvements each year. Participant 1 mentioned survey questions that relate to diversity are *"Do I feel like my voice is being heard" "Do I feel belonging,"* and *"Do I feel a sense of equality in decision making."*

"The survey given with a bank of questions around inclusion and belonging… that is how much of it is measured" Participant 2 (Male).

DIB Team

80% of the survey participants discussed company X's *'Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging (DIB)'* initiatives. The DIB steering committee has set up goals around gender balance. This committee's job is to help the company reach the targets they have set itself. This is the first-year company X has had said goal, which is why it is evident it is a big topic of discussion throughout the interviews with all participants. To make this happen, the company is educating their managers. Hence, they hire the correct people and inform the recruitment teams so they can attract different genders to the roles being advertised. Trials around job descriptions were done to see if they included both genders, and more men were applying. Participant 4 discussed how it is essential to focus on gender equality now as it is needed. They feel there should be a more excellent balance at senior leadership levels. Measurements for these goals are still being worked on, and they will be put in place annually.

"Looking at that gender diversity at senior levels is where we are starting, with the hope to see it end up across all management layers" Participant 5 (Female).

"We have done pilots across the business around the wording being used…. The stats told us the job description is written mainly attracting males" Participant 5 (Female).

"We got a lot of gender equality in some areas we need to focus on" Participant 4 (Female).

STEM initiative

Company X has recently sponsored a STEM initiative with Trinity College. This aims to encourage females to partake in a STEM-related degree so they can progress in this field. Participant 3 discussed the extreme lack of women in technical roles and how the company sponsors this initiative and fellowships to try and make a change. The participant discussed how most of the people coming from technology backgrounds are males and wish to try and help improve that figure.

"Typically, ballpark 78% of people coming out of technological backgrounds are men" Participant 3 (Male).

Implications and Limitations

As most of these initiatives and programs are now 100% the participant involved, they have stated it is too early to tell if they have been a success or not. Progress has been made, but significant changes have not been made yet. The improvement is shown through their gold standard award for diversity and inclusion, but there is still room to improve further. There is still so much to look at and change regarding gender. These initiatives are all planned by the company, so they defer from the author's research, which means there is no research to prove if it will work; however, said the organisation makes initiatives in the hope of helping change gender diversity for the better.

Conclusions

Company x has a good plan with a goal to be reached by 2030. Their focus seems to be on improving their gender diversity within leadership roles within the company. All participants are aware of these goals, showing they are making it known through the different departments and hierarchies. They measure their progress through their engagement surveys given to everyone working for the company and monitoring gender attendance at events. Their DIB team has made a good start in getting all leadership levels involved so they can be educated on how the changes can be made, and all interviewees were confident progress will be made for their target of 2030.

Research Objective 5

To determine the programs the company has in place currently to help create a more gender-diverse company culture

Relevant themes:

-mentoring circles within the business enable women to have a women mentor to look up to.

-Rewards for their diversity and inclusion.

Programs:

Mentoring circles

Company X has mentoring programs which encourage women and men to get involved. Diversity is encouraged early on within the company, and Participant 2 mentioned how staff must take place in a diversity and inclusion workshop when they join. This workshop allows them to gain the knowledge to mentor colleagues.

The mentoring program has been set up to encourage women to take part. It allows females to encourage other females to progress in their careers. They are looking to continue this, so it will help women advance in their careers and feel they have a mentor to help them. The mentoring circle has been a great success, with loads of women joining as mentors and mentees.

"We have many female SLT leaders who have signed up and are mentoring people across the business," Participant 4 (Female).

"It is something we can keep pushing and do more encouragement in that space," Participant 3 (Male).

Company X has a sustainability program that helps them measure diversity and progression. All of this surrounds the way the company is and how they operate. They have been nominated for a diversity and inclusion award in Ireland. They also encourage networks for pride, women, and accessibility in the UK. All these programs within the said company help to promote diversity and inclusion. The company measures event attendance based on age, ethnicity, and gender to see if these programs are effective.

"We measure attendance at events… all based on diversity data gender, ethnicity, age" Participant 1 (Female).

Limitations and implications

Limitations of the progress may include the company not having a woman in leadership workshop for females specifically, which will allow them to feel confident and comfortable in progressing. This was mentioned by participant 2, who noted their last company had this. This could be important in driving the progression of women into senior roles. A lack of females in senior roles could also be a barrier for real change to be made as they can progress without room for progression.

They lack female senior positions within the company, leaving little room for senior mentors. This will mean women can't have a mentor in a high senior position and won't have anyone to aspire to be. The mentors must be inspiring women mentees to progress within the company. The company does have mainly women in its HR department, as discussed by Participant 6. The HR department therefore understands and knows the importance of having equal amounts of males and females, which will be positive during the application process. It is important to note that the literature review presented findings for the author that are consistent with the success of mentoring circles. It was found mentoring is a positive way of implementing diversity. It gives women the confidence to get involved in group events, making them feel more comfortable in their roles (CIPD, 2015).

<u>Conclusion</u>

The company has various programs that all staff members can get involved in, like mentoring programs. As well as this, they have made progress by reaching gold industry standards for their diversity and inclusion. Company X is making significant progress with their current programs but still has much more work. The company lacks a straightforward program specifically for women in the company to help encourage them to progress. A training program catered toward women in leadership will give them the confidence to gain.

Chapter 5: Discussion

In this chapter, the author will analyse the key findings in more depth and discuss how it relates to past literature and what the author has learned. As well, the author will go into more detail about any implications and limitations of the research conducted.

The research was to determine if women have progressed in recent years in the telecommunications industry and discuss how a company's HR department can help improve diversity through initiatives. Discussions were made surrounding the initiatives a company can implement to help with the improvements, as well as discussing the success of programs to combat issues surrounding the lack of females within the industry. The author will also discuss the barriers still evident for women progressing with their careers and if there is a correlation between the level of education a person has and their seniority within the industry.

Have companies become more gender diverse

Company X has begun to make plans to try and improve its gender diversity at different levels within the company. It is clear from interviewing all participants this initiative in place is very new for the company. Over the last five years, female leadership roles in the company have increased from 29% to 36%. They have a target to reach 50% by 2030 at the executive level. Overall, they are on track in the broader sense, with 45% of the employees in the company being female. CSO (2019) reported that only one-third of people employed within an ICT job are women. This would suggest that the telecommunication industry needs more work to become gender diverse. Company x also must ensure they are effectively implementing their plan into practice. Consistent with research, gender progression wasn't a priority ten years ago and therefore wasn't monitored (Hafkin and Huyer, 2008). Differences show that company x has made more progress than the CSO reported. The CSO (2019) said that only around 30% of women were in ICT leadership positions; company X stands at 36% (CSO, 2019).

Positive implications of company x target will lead to a complete equal workforce at the leadership level and the company overall in terms of gender. Limitations may include not enough women applying for the role. They must ensure they advertise correctly to entice both genders. Participant 5 discussed how they advertised a job during a pilot/ test run, and only men applied. They must ensure this doesn't happen in future circumstances as it

may derail plans. However, research shows women have a better success rate with their applications (Prenzler, Fleming, and King, 2010).

Enforce HR initiatives to improve gender diversity

 The initiatives company X has implemented are still very new, so there is no way of telling if they are working yet. As it stands, the company has disclosed to the author in Ireland that 36% of those in leadership and women have a target to reach 50% by 2030. The UK office has 32% of women in leadership and has the same goal. 100% of those interviewed were aware of the initiatives and agreed it was the correct route for the organisation. Having initiatives based upon gender diversity has become a focus with company x. Consistent with research Kulik (2022) discusses the importance most companies have now on gender diversity.

As discussed in the literature review, there is no research to prove if gender diversity initiatives have worked, as most companies are still bringing change (Tardos and Paksi, 2018). Consistencies between the research gathered from the interviews, and the literature review can be seen. Gender equality initiatives are hard to measure as there hasn't been much success (Hafkin and Huyer, 2008). Differences show as company X has received rewards for their progress and has a plan to see progress each year.

This target motivates the recruitment team to find the right people for the job while keeping in mind gender diversity. All the author's research hasn't suggested that anything like this has been a success in Ireland even though plans are in place; however, a study done in Australia discussed did prove that setting a target did increase women at the executive level in 200 Australian companies (Kulik, 2022). There is no research to suggest a complete 50/50 split, which company x wants; this may bring limitations regarding reaching their target by 2030. Ireland has plans to introduce initiatives in education to engage gender in STEM-related roles (Dunne et al., 2022).

Mentoring circles

Company X implementing mentoring circles is a significant step to bringing around change and diversity. Mentoring allows for better relationships to be built in a workplace. It has a strong positive impact on gender and diversity (Janssen, Vuuren, and Jong, 2015). Having a good set of mentors for both women and men will allow for the successful

implementation of initiatives. As mentioned by participants 4 and 6, the mentoring circles involve a lot of females. Having female involvement will help support female mentees for future progression. CIPD (2015) believes that having a solid mentorship will help support gender diversity and advance into more executive roles.

Positive implications come into play for company X regarding mentoring circles as those being mentors will feel confident when looking to progress into higher ranking roles within the said company and improve inclusivity (Janssen, Vuuren, and Jong, 2015). Participant 2 discussed how mentoring circles have helped to create a positive working culture. Past research states mentoring programs help women follow and develop their career paths (Noe, 1988).

Barriers that improved within Company X

Many barriers still affect a women's professional career and progression. Company x has made significant progress in terms of gender diversity, therefore, reducing barriers. A significant barrier that everyone discussed was maternity leave. Historically, as mentioned in the literature review, it falls on the mother to look after the child and take most of the parental leave (Ferrante, 2018). All interviewees discussed how they still think this is unfair. Participant 5 discussed how she was promoted twice while out on maternity leave. Participant 4 also stated that company X encourage parental leave and keeps in touch with the parents when they are off as everything moves very fast in the telecommunication industry. Keeping mothers in the loop throughout their time off decreases issues with said barriers as they are less likely to fall behind after their time off.

Company X also offers flexible work practices such as hybrid and time off. This type of work has become increasingly popular since the covid-19 pandemic, with participants in company X discussing how it has allowed them, both male and females, to spend more time at home with their families. The author's literature review has suggested negative implications regarding working from home or having flexible hours, which may prevent women from entering higher positions (Reddy, Adhikari, and Chitranshi, 2017). However, the interviews with the participants contradicted this view, as 83% work from home at least two days a week. When discussing if this brought negative implications for their career, they all agreed flexible working is a significant positive for both males and females in the working world as it creates happier employees.

The only barrier in company x is the lack of female role models in high-ranking positions. 100% of the interviewees did discuss how there could be more female role models in leadership roles. This is consistent with the author's research as a significant hindrance to a female progressing in the working environment is not having encouragement from role models (Newmarch, Taylor-Steele, and Cumpston, 2000). The negative limitations are that current staff have very few role models to look up to for encouragement. There is still an apparent lack of women in STEM-related fields, so it is hard for women to have the courage to enter said industries (Chowdhury et al., 2021). However, company x sponsored a STEM initiative to encourage females to do their degree in a related field. This shows how ready company x is and how much they promote diversity. They are doing this to stimulate women to pick up a career in the technological sector. This is a favourable implication with participant 3 being confident this initiative will bring forward more females in STEM degrees creating a more diversified workforce.

Education and senior positions

None of the information collected in the interviews suggests that education helps women progress within their careers. Information collected shows there is a mixture of education levels with Participant 3, who is male, being CPO and having a masters and Participant 4, who is female, has no degree and is the head of learning and development in company X. Other participants had a degree. Still, they weren't necessarily in a related field or others and had no degree. Participant 2 did discuss that most of this is out of luck, and if they were interviewing for a job now, having a degree or a master's is preferred in the working world. This statement is consistent with the research conducted, as it will hinder future females or even males from being exposed to leadership roles (Belingheri et al., 2021).

No research gathered suggests gender comes into account in this sense. Having no degree may bring negative implications for new staff looking to join company X. An important note wasn't mentioned by any interviewees but was found in research is having a high-level of education can allow a woman to get paid more than a man (Roethlisberger et al., 2022). Most of the women didn't have a college degree, which is inconsistent with research done by the author as apparently having a degree makes a woman more likely to enter an ICT role. Another barrier found in a study that wasn't mentioned is the lack of exposure at school to IT for women (Cheryan et al., 2017).

Limitations

This study aimed to determine if women have been able to progress within the telecommunications industry over the years and how a company's HR department can help with said progression.

The interview process was conducted over Microsoft teams and during the summer, so there were several negative issues. A significant limitation that affected the author's research was the difficulties surrounding setting up the interviews. The telecommunications company being used is changing other areas unrelated to this topic, and due to this and conflicting schedules, it wasn't easy to get interviewees. The author wanted to interview eight people, but, it was only possible to interview 6.

Due to a technical issue with participant 6, the connection was terrible, so some of the sound quality wasn't great in the recording. The author, therefore, had to rely on notes.

Other limitations included some statistics not being made available as they haven't been published yet in Ireland, and some weren't monitored in the past. The company couldn't release unpublished information other than its plans for a 50/50 split in 2030

Chapter 6 Conclusion and Recommendations

In this last chapter, the author summarizes the research and makes closing statements. The final interpretations from the interviews conducted with company x will be discussed, and recommendations for future research.

The motivation behind this research paper was to investigate if women have progressed in recent years within the workplace, particularly within the telecommunications industry, due to the observation of a lack of females within STEM-related careers. As well as this, the author wanted to determine if a company's HR policies and initiatives can motivate women and allow them to progress in their field.

A company must create a workplace culture in which its staff feels comfortable. A company's initiatives are much in line with its policies for them to be a success. Creating a friendly workplace culture allows all employees to support the initiatives to improve gender inequality issues at all levels of a business. To determine if their initiatives are improving each year a company must also monitor progression through company metrics and assess the number of female employees at different levels of the business.

The research confirms what we were already aware of. There is still work needed to be done in the telecommunications industry for women to progress. The statistics from the CSO (2012) (2019) consistent of the research gathered from company X. Women's progression in ICT stands at around 30%. However, it wasn't explicitly monitored in the past so past figures may vary. The new focus on gender diversity initiatives has been highlighted throughout research (Kulik, 2022). Company x putting this same focus in place is consistent with current literature. This finding is of particular importance for the study. It proves what was already known.

General comments surrounding diversity in the company

The author can interpret from the research that company X is confident it will reach its target of a 50/50 split at the boardroom level by 2030. It can be evaluated gender diversity has become a focal point for many technology companies and telecommunication companies all over the world. This focus has come because of research done over the years by different bodies such as CIPD (2015) and IBEC (Keogh, 2020), which have discussed the lack of women in this industry. For company X to reach their goal, it must look at the policies and ensure they have the means to do so. They must ask themselves what can be done to ensure they successfully recruit both males and females to roles to be

as fair as possible in the applications process, as well as what they are going to implement to support women in leadership, for example, women in leadership workshops or training programs. These training programs could be successful in helping both internal and external applicants to leadership roles. Fox (2016) firmly believes training programs will support women's careers.

Concluding interpretations of each objective

Even though companies have made some progress over the years, there is still a long way to go for companies to become gender diverse. It was found there are more women employed in human resource-related roles compared to men, but it was mentioned how there is still a lack of women in technology roles and at the leadership level. Consistent with research, this relates to previous research as it confirms that progression is needed within the telecommunications industry for women (Kulik, 2022).

Women still face many barriers discussed throughout this research paper, such as parental leave, lack of female role models, pay gap, and stereotypes. Barriers have gotten progressively better for women over the years. One interviewee stated she hasn't faced many obstacles in her career and even got promoted during her maternity leave. It is also important to note that both men said they hadn't met any obstacles or treatment throughout their career journey, proving how different men and women have been treated over the years. Consistent with the literature, most barriers are due to *'societal norms'*. The difference shows that although the participant felt there were barriers, they have improved in recent years (Mullet, Rinn, and Kettler, 2017).

In terms of educational levels compared to the level of seniority within the company, there is nothing to prove education is a barrier for women, as those interviewed had a mix of academic backgrounds. One leader was female, and she had no degree; one leader was male and had a master's. The others interviewed were a mix of males and females with no degrees. Belingheri et al. (2021) did highlight education is essential for building a career; however, most women in company x didn't have a degree, even those with leadership roles.

The company has initiatives in place, and as mentioned throughout the literature review, companies have begun to enforce gender diversity initiatives recently. However, these initiatives are still new, so there is no progress measured to date, and they don't plan to

reach their goal until 2030. Other initiatives include a STEM initiative with Trinity College to help support women and encourage women in STEM fields. This shows they are on the right track and are encouraging more women to progress in the industry, but with a lack of room for progression, there is still a long way to go. Chowdhury et al. (2021) discussed the lack of women in STEM degrees. Company X's STEM initiative is a step forward to combat this issue.

A business needs to have programs in place to encourage its staff. In terms of gender equality, having a training program in a company allows for happy workplace culture and promotes progression within a business. Even though company x has some programs, such as mentoring circles, it has been found. Having women act as mentors for other women in the workplace allows for encouragement. They also serve as a role model for other women so they can aspire to progress. The mentoring circles have proved successful, with loads of women signing up. Research shows mentoring helps improve employee performance (Tardos and Paksi, 2018). They have also received rewards for inclusivity and progression as part of their sustainability program. The company has received a gold recognition award. It is of belief company x could have more training programs catered towards women in leadership.

Recommendations for future research

From this research paper, it can be determined that various areas are open to future research. Firstly, it would be of recommendation to widen the scope of analysis to interview different telecommunication companies in Ireland were possible to determine differences between initiatives in other companies and see if more progress has been made up until now. This would be beneficial for research purposes as the researcher would have more to compare it with as not many publications of initiatives have been made in Ireland yet.

Another area the author would recommend is extending the research further to different STEM degrees in various Irish colleges to investigate the number of males and females in STEM-related degrees. As well as this, it would be beneficial to get first-hand information regarding drop-out rates of different genders in said degrees to determine differences. The researcher could also ask if the college has this information, the percentage of male and female graduates in STEM fields who have progressed into the

telecommunications industry, as it is tough to find up-to-date details solely on this sector other than looking at IT careers in general.

It would be beneficial for a researcher to do similar research in 10 years to determine if there has been any progression. It would be helpful to measure how successful gender diversity initiatives have been over the next ten years to determine if any significant changes have been made or if there is still some way to go.

Company initiatives

In terms of company x, it is recommended they continue with their plan to achieve a complete 50/50 split at the boardroom level by 2030. They must devise a way to measure this annually over the next eight years so they can see the change. If they do not reach the split by 2030, it is recommended that they keep plans in motion to get the split and set a new goal. There is little cost involved with this initiative. However, the company must ensure they keep on top of their goals by setting yearly targets. The company must ensure they are promoting the initiative to get their employees on board by engaging them.

Engagement initiatives

The company could hold what is called a 'synthesis session.' This engagement initiative will let all employees know about any business difficulties and challenges. It allows leaders to speak on these issues and discuss what is going on in the future so everyone can stay in the loop. This should be implemented by January 2023 so employees can be fully engaged through the process of the initiative.

Costs consideration :

Engagement activities to allow the employees to discuss issues and listen to those in leadership within their company will allow them to feel comfortable when looking to progress as they already have a rough idea of what is going on within the different leadership departments. Companies should allocate a certain amount each year towards these initiatives. A company should keep 2,500 euros every quarter for engagement activities. This will cost the company 10,000 euros per annum which should be considered in the L&D budget.

Timeline: This should be implemented by 2023 and go towards their 2030 initiatives. Timelines should look to see improvement in leadership engagements for females by 2025.

Women in leadership training

It is also recommended that company x set up a separate training program for women in leadership to support female employees in their career progression. This will allow female staff members to feel comfortable progressing within said company and improve retention rates.

Cost consideration:

The L&D training budget must be considered. Leadership training can cost around 200 euros per hour. 36% of the leadership team is currently female. If there is 100 leadership roles, there are now 36 women in leadership roles. To get the 50/50 split the company will need to train 14 women so they can progress. The company must budget 2,800 euros per/hour for this training over 2 years.

The company also must consider its own time. If they set their target to 2030, they must consistently ensure they have the budget to train.

Timeline: This timeline should be part of their 2030 strategy with progress to be seen in 2025.

Personal learning statement:

Conducting this thesis has been a great challenge for me. I didn't expect unprecedented challenges. Conducting the research was a fun and challenging experience. Over the last four years, I have been a college student studying my undergrad and doing my master's, all while working part-time. When I started my master's, I knew it would be challenging. However, I kept telling myself not to give up.

For my dissertation, I wanted to study something interesting. From a young age, my dad always taught me to be independent and encouraged me to do well and not have to rely on someone else. This interested me to look at women's progression over the years because I

knew they weren't always encouraged to have a career. I choose to investigate this in the telecommunications industry because it is accessible from my job.

I had expectations going into this, and while some were met, others weren't. I thought it would be easy to access HR professionals to interview, but I was wrong. I started the process of seeking interviews very early on. However, I completely understand that it took me a long time to get my interviews done due to the staff being bustling and under pressure and some people being on annual leave. When the process finally began, more difficulties were presented when getting people to sign up for interview times. After all this, I finally got six interviews completed. Ideally, I wanted eight, but that wasn't possible due to annual leave and lack of staff.

After the interviews, I felt a sense of relief and gratitude for all those involved because now I understand just how busy and stressful their working environment can be from discussions with them.

It stood out that everyone was aware of the initiatives surrounding gender diversity, how measurements are made, and other programs available in the company. Some interviewees weren't aware of all the programs, but that was due to it being nowhere near the department or priority. From the interviews, I hoped to gain more insight into progression in the last ten years and see more progression to date. However, disappointed as most of that is still in the works. Some company metrics couldn't be given to me as they haven't been published yet. I expected more women in higher positions through my research and a more diverse board. Even still, I was happy to see that all employees were confident that the company would reach its goal of a 50/50 split by 2030. It showed me that they had confidence in the company they work for. I was also delighted to hear that each employee was happy with the culture of the workplace.

Even though little progress has been made to date, the employees' happiness gives me confidence in company x. I still believe that the company should be doing a lot more. However, I am happy that they have a plan in place and feel that if they could do it sooner, they would. Due to the lack of available positions at the boardroom level, I understand why this goal will take several years to reach.

After reflection on this whole experience, I learned a lot. Younger me would be proud of where I am today doing a master's degree as I have always been told I need to work hard to do well. I believe my review is only a tiny part of what can be researched about this

issue. In a few years, more company metrics will be available and published to delve deeper into gender diversity in the telecommunications industry. I wish I were able to immerse myself even further.

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Appendix 1

NCI Masters' Dissertation Questions:

1. Could you please tell me about your educational background and how you got into your career?

   - how long have you been working in your professional career?

2. What obstacles have you faced, if any, during your career progression?

   - Could you discuss these obstacles in more detail with examples, did it effect your progression with your career?

3. Have you heard of any initiatives in your company to combat the issue of gender diversity?

   -How are these initiatives measured?

4. Are you aware of any programmes within said company that measure diversity and progression?

   -How are said programmes measured?

5. Do you feel as though said initiatives/ programmes have been a success and how has it helped you as an individual?

6. What else do you think the company could implement to measure/ tackle gender diversity?

7. What metrics do said company monitor to determine if gender diversity is improving each year?

8. Based on your opinion has there been enough female mentors in your professional career within said company. i.e. women mentors/ women in high ranking positions?

   - Following up, have you noticed an increase in the number of female colleagues/ female in high ranking positions in recent years compared to that of the past?

9. Have you ever faced any sort of different treatment in terms of your career and if so what has it been?

10. Do you feel as though the company offers flexible working practices for example hybrid working, time off, job sharing, flextime etc
    - Do you avail of these flexible working practices?
    - Do you feel as though availing of this may affect your progression opportunities in a negative or positive way?

11. In your opinion is there any barriers that women face in their career journey? i.e. parental leave, lack of role models, pay gap, stereotypes.

12. Are you happy with your current workplace culture in terms of values and equality?