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## **UNLOCKING THE PERFORMANCE OF FEMALE MANAGERS IN A GLOBAL COSMETICS COMPANY THROUGH THE LENS OF GENDER AT WORK FRAMEWORK**

**Restu Widiati**

Gender studies, School of Strategic and Global Studies,  
Universitas Indonesia, Jakarta, Indonesia  
Email: [rwidiati@gmail.com](mailto:rwidiati@gmail.com)

**Mia Siscawati**

Gender studies, School of Strategic and Global Studies,  
Universitas Indonesia, Jakarta, Indonesia

**Arianna Costantini**

Department of Psychology, University of Bologna, Bologna, Italy

**Budi W. Soetjipto**

Graduate School of Management, Faculty of Economic and Business,  
Universitas Indonesia, Depok, Indonesia

### **ABSTRACT**

*Despite the growth and dynamism within the cosmetics industry, gender disparities in senior leadership persist, raising critical questions about how an ecosystem and various forces can impact the performance and professional advancement of female leaders. This qualitative case study explores the dynamics of female managerial performance within a global cosmetics company, focusing on two subsidiaries in countries with lower gender equality indices, namely India and Indonesia. Using the modified Gender at Work Framework developed by Rao et al. (2016), the research analysed the multifaceted factors influencing the performance of female managers within this industry. By navigating the intertwined areas of company policies, resources, organisation norms, and self-consciousness, the study aims to unearth nuanced insights into female managers' challenges and opportunities in these settings. Four themes are emerging: (1) Gender Equality at work, (2) Ownership of Performance and Career, (3) Digital Capability and innovation, and (4) Support system. Other findings of this study concern the various parties and the different environments that may foster the performance of female managers. This research contributes to the broader context of gender in the workplace, shedding light on strategies to enhance the performance and advancement of female managers within the cosmetics industry, particularly in regions where gender disparities persist.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The global cosmetics industry, renowned for its innovation and influence, stands as a dynamic sector where creativity converges with consumer demands. It is estimated to grow and reach more than \$580 billion by 2027 (McKinsey & Company, 2023). While the cosmetics industry has witnessed remarkable growth and transformation in recent years, the gender disparities that persist among senior leaders within its corporate structures cannot be overlooked. Gender diversity is continuously improving in the beauty industry, but the most senior leaders are still dominated by men (MBS Intelligence, 2023).

This study aims to explore the ecosystem that may foster the performance of female managers operating in a leading global cosmetics company, focusing on two subsidiaries in India and Indonesia. The choice of India and Indonesia as research sites is deliberate, considering they are among the biggest markets within the South Asia zone (Kantar, 2022), and acknowledging the distinctive challenges and opportunities presented by their sociocultural effect as they represent countries with lower gender equality index. According to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2022, Indonesia is at rank 92 with an index of 69%, while India is at rank 135 with an index of 62% (World Economic Forum, 2022).

Within the vibrant landscape of the beauty industry, the role of female managers assumes particular significance, as they navigate the complexities of leadership in a field largely shaped by diverse cultural nuances and consumer expectations. To comprehensively examine and understand the factors influencing the professional trajectories and performance of female managers, this research employs the Gender at Work Framework, as conceptualized by Rao et. al. (2016). This framework provides a comprehensive lens to analyse the interplay of organizational dynamics, cultural contexts, and individual experiences shaping the professional journeys of female leaders within this specific industry and geographic context. This study serves as a mini-scale reflection of broader issues faced by female managers in regions where gender disparities persist. Through this exploration, the study aims not only to contribute valuable insights to the cosmetics industry but also to enrich the broader discourse on gender in the workplace. The purpose of this study hence is to explore the complexities surrounding the performance of female managers in a global cosmetics company, shedding light on the strategies that can be employed to drive inclusivity, empowerment, and success for female leaders in regions marked by unique gender equality challenges.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

To support a conceptual understanding of the different relationships and efforts related to female managers' performance, this research modified "The Gender at Work Analytical Framework" (Rao et al., 2016). The approach was inspired by a study on Indonesia's government water workforce (Soeters et al., 2021). This analytical framework helps to understand the impact of various interventions relating to gender relations inside an organization. It divides the

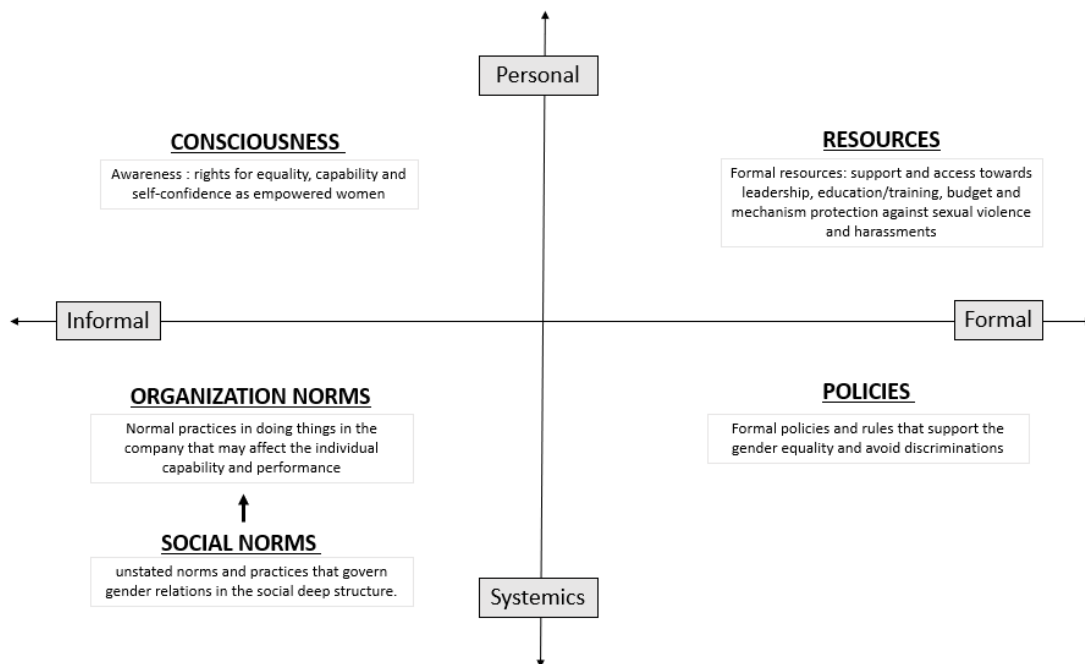
framework based on those interventions which on one part are personal or collective, and on the other part are based on the nature which are formal or informal. To support this study, the framework is modified as it is for analysing female managers' performance and considering that this is in the context of a corporation, the analysis regarding social norms is modified to be more relevant to organisational norms. Therefore, the modified framework covers four quadrants of power dynamics, namely Consciousness, Resources, Policies, and Organizational Norms (See Figure 1).

Consciousness includes an analysis of whether female managers in the company are aware of their rights for gender equality and have the capability and confidence as empowered women to enable them to perform well at work. This study specifically examines things that female managers are aware of in their capabilities and self-confidence in driving their performance.

Resources are available within the organization for female managers to enable them to perform optimally at work. Those resources are in the form of training or development programs and benefits, including support from the leaders, as well as mechanisms to protect against violence and sexual harassment at work.

Policies are formal rules and regulations communicated and provided by the company, including the organization's principles and values, that support gender equality and prevent discriminatory practices. This research will explore various policies and regulations applied within the organization relevant to and enabling the performance of female managers at work.

Organizational Norms in the context of the corporation mean the normal practices or ways of doing things in a company that can affect the power and ability of women to make a full contribution to the organization. This study reviews specifically organizational norms and some particular social culture that may influence female managers' performance.



**Figure 1. The modified Gender at work framework (Rao et al., 2016)**

## METHODOLOGY

This study applies a qualitative approach to investigate and comprehend the overall ecosystem impacting female managers at a multinational cosmetics firm through a case study (Creswell, 2018). Two series of separate focus group discussions (FGD) were organised for each country, attended by 22 participants from both countries. To understand deeper insights gathered

from FGD, a total of 13 informants were arranged for semi-structured interviews representing the diverse target population. These informants represent each country, including married and single female managers, those with tenure ranging from one year to more than six years, those who have direct related business roles and those from support functions. Also considering the representation of their work locations, mixing those who are based in regional offices and at the subsidiaries' headquarters. To gain a more comprehensive context, relevant documents were studied, and interviews were also conducted with representatives of the management with HR managers and those overseeing diversity policy in each country to understand the background and intentions of the company through its policies, principles, and values. Every quadrant of the study's framework is covered by this qualitative method

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

Thematic analysis, as described by Bryman (2012), was used in this study to examine qualitative data. Simple categories were created early in the fieldwork process based on participants' characteristics and observed events. Every FGD and interview was recorded, transcribed, and reviewed for theme analysis. Following that, the transcriptions were categorised and tagged based on recurrent themes. The assembled transcripts comprised a set of data emphasising the individual viewpoints of female managers. Four themes are emerging from the FGD sessions and interviews: (1) Gender Equality at work, (2) Ownership of Performance and Career, (3) Digital Capability and Innovation, and (4) Support system. The findings about each theme are provided in the following sections, which draw on the relevant quadrants of the gender-at-work framework, with each quadrant elaborated on corporate policies, resources, organisation norms, and consciousness.

### ***1.1. Gender Equality Practices at Work***

In this study, gender equality is reflected by the presence of gender diversity and equal conditions between men and women in fulfilling rights and obligations, with fairness, equality, and integration (Bailyn, 2003). Before we elaborate on the findings, we will provide some relevant analysis to give the context about gender equality. As of the end of 2023, the proportion of female managers in the subsidiary of India is about 30%, this is consistent with the proportion of total female employees of the subsidiary. Meanwhile, proportion of their senior female leaders are a bit higher at about 36%. In the subsidiary of Indonesia, the proportion of female managers is about 48% of the total managers, which is slightly higher than the overall number of female employees at about 42%. Meanwhile, the proportion of senior female leaders in Indonesia is precisely at 50% of total senior leaders. According to the report by the UN, in 2023 globally women held 28.2% of the managerial positions, the proportion of females in managerial positions for India is 14.95% and for Indonesia is 24.15%. This means that the situation in both subsidiaries is better than the global and by-country situations as reported by the UN. However, the company face challenges in increasing the proportion of female managers and even maintaining at this level. Despite the equal career opportunities provided by the company, there are some specific challenges faced by female employees especially after married and having children. The following section is the elaboration of gender equality practices at work analysed using the gender at work framework with company policies, resources, organization norms, and consciousness.

### **Company's policies**

The group has the mission to offer each person around the world the best of beauty: for all skin and hair types, all genders, all identities, all cultures, and all ages. Based on this mission, the group consistently promotes diversity and inclusion as they fuel the innovation and inspiration to reach this mission, supported by a Code of Ethics. Furthermore, it aims to create a workplace that

is free of harassment or bullying, gaslighting, hostility, and any form of sexual harassment or sexist behaviour and where everyone can work and thrive in a collaborative and respectful environment. In addition, the group has issued some relevant policies, such as the Employee Human Rights Policy and Group Speak Up Policy. Both subsidiaries monitor and report regularly the proportion of gender balance at the top leadership level as well as the total workforce. In applying various HR policies. The Group has a clear direction of implementing non-discrimination practices and conducting unbiased processes. All these initiatives have been recognized by reputable organizations such as the Bloomberg Gender Equality Index and the Equileap Global Gender Equality Ranking.

Most respondents perceive the positive intention of the company to implement policies which uphold the gender equality and inclusivity principles. They confirm that the company has issued various policies and provided working conditions that support and enable women to perform their work. In terms of recruitment, all respondents believe that by the policy there is equal opportunity and that there is no discrimination by gender. Despite the awareness that the formal policies have stated there is no discrimination in recruitment, there are some inequalities in both countries for certain positions which are currently dominated by male employees, such as in field sales roles and warehouse operations. All respondents confirm that training programs and rewards policies are provided to all employees based on certain HR parameters (position, competencies, etc.), and those programs do not discriminate by gender. The following subjects describe the implementation of policies which reflect gender equality and care for women at work.

“Somehow reflected that the group is trying to create a comfortable work environment for women. From their point of view, they guarantee that there will be an Ethics Day, and they can also have a direct channel for sharing problems at work or any inappropriate treatment for sexual harassment. Also, continue to take mental care. For example, if there is a mental issue, it means being too tired. You can do it through Employee Assistance. Also, in terms of benefits, the facilities accommodate women's needs, for example when we are on menstrual leave, marital leave, or medical leave. So, in my opinion, the group is very inclined towards making it rich... to improve the welfare of its female employees.” (FGD, Indonesia)

## **Resources**

The implementation of gender equality at work is guarded by the Human Resources department through various policies. At least once a year, there is an employee opinion survey conducted by an independent external consultant that includes questions regarding any discrimination issues and the implementation of HR policies. In addition, training programs on diversity and inclusion are organised regularly for all employees, to help increase the awareness on gender equality. Further, team managers are assessed through regular leadership assessment programs, allowing team members to provide feedback for any breach in diversity and inclusion, including gender equality principles.

The following subject was mentioned regarding the situation in general and the important role of HR and training.

“Gender equality is very seriously considered here. And there is no, no discrimination whatsoever based on your, on your gender... I know that for colleagues with women, colleagues with children, it's pretty manageable for them as well because they, we have a flexible, uh, kind of hybrid work model, .....we have HR partners who we can talk to if there's any issue whatsoever. Um, we have a lot of training and learning opportunities that are organized for us. Um, we have a very, uh,. flexible-leave policy.” (Any, Marketing, single, India).



## **Organisation norms**

Gender equality practices at work are influenced by the organization's norms and the presence of social culture. In both countries there is a condition that to be accepted at work, women are expected to look, to behave, and to communicate or express in certain ways. When women behave or express themselves in the same way as men, often they are perceived differently and considered negatively. For example, women are expected to behave more calmly, not showing too much of their emotions, and to be more patient, hence when these female managers expressed firmness in making decisions or showing disappointments in similar ways as how their male colleagues usually do, they are considered as being aggressive or emotional. Meanwhile, when men are expressing the same way, they are considered normal and just being assertive.

“The ideal man by the patriarchal book will be loud, will be banging a desk to make a point. Whereas an ideal woman will be what? A more feminine delegate speaks in a lower voice. So, since that narrative is slowly tumbling, as we grow up as adults also, we tend to carry that. I want to be more feminine in my approach to be perceived as a better woman. The people perceiving if a woman is loud and boisterous, uh, that is not seen as a feminine trait.” (Tara, married, India).

Being in a cosmetics company these female managers are aware that as women they are more pressured to have certain standards on how they look. Meanwhile, there is no such standard for their male colleagues.

“One interesting point is women are expected to look in certain ways compared to men in the workplace. Women are more pressured to have proper looks and always be prim, to be at a certain standard. The pressure of also appear a certain wear, we have a different standard of how you end up looking”. (FGD, India)

In both cultures, there is the stigma that women are the main, if not the single responsible for taking care of the family and the household. Consequently, after getting married and having children, female managers at work would have to face additional challenges in balancing their professional and family life. Some of them are even requested to give up their career, to focus their life on taking care of their families. This stigma has caused unconscious bias for certain promotion decisions. For example, in deciding candidates to be promoted in field-sales areas (up-country roles), unconsciously females are eliminated due to the assumption that they will not be mobile enough for the role as they need to take care of their family.

“The difference between female and male managers is personal. It's more about the stigma. So, it's like when you are already married or you already have a family and you have children, suddenly there is a burden that is specifically for women, to take care of the family, to take care of the house and to take care of the children. That's how it is. As if like that task is only for women”. (FGD, Indonesia).

## **Consciousness**

Following a series of training programs and communication sessions, the awareness of diversity and gender equality has been increased within the organization. It is recognized that the organization could improve the balanced proportion of gender in certain divisions and positions. All interviewees agree that as female managers they have equal opportunity to perform at their jobs and further grow their careers within the organization. They believe that within the organization gender equality is already good and that career opportunities that can be obtained by men can also be obtained by them. This belief helps female managers to gain the confidence to perform and to pursue further their career growth.

“..., in here, gender equality is already good, opportunities that can be obtained by men can also be obtained by women”. (FGD, Indonesia).

### **Summary of key findings on gender equality practices at work**

Respondents during FGD and interviews have mentioned that it is important to be in an organization that upholds gender equality, as it helps them feel and experience equal treatment hence having the confidence to perform well and further grow their careers. There are relevant policies issued in both subsidiaries (Indonesia and India) as a global direction from the headquarters. In general, most respondents recognize and appreciate the policies implemented by the management to uphold gender equality at work. While this is the case, there are certain policies such as recruitment and promotions that are more challenging to uphold the equality of opportunity for females in particular functions and fields of work. There is also the influence of social culture in both countries, with the presence of a strong stigma regarding the expectation of women to be the main responsible for handling family and household matters, which adds more challenge for female managers to further grow their careers at work.

#### ***1.2. Ownership of Performance and Career***

Through FGD sessions and a series of interviews, we gathered insights from the female managers in both subsidiaries that they require to have the ownership and the drive for their performance and career. If they don't speak up about their challenges at work and career aspirations, it will be hard for them to perform optimally and to achieve their career goals. The following section is the elaboration of ownership of performance and career by female managers on company policies, resources, organisation norms, and consciousness.

#### **Company's policies**

The company implements performance evaluation systems and career development communication sessions for each employee. At least twice a year each employee will have discussion sessions with their leaders regarding their performance and the direction of their career development. It is also the occasion to express their career aspirations. In addition, there is an online internal communication platform accessible by each employee, allowing them to request and arrange communication sessions any time of the year with their leaders, to discuss their performance and career aspirations. Most respondents agree that companies have the intention to implement equal opportunities in terms of career progression. However, they also recognize that for certain positions the opportunity to be promoted for women is lower, due to the nature of the job, and due to a lower pool of female employees. In terms of growing career and promotion, most respondents believe that the group is fair and applies equal opportunity for all. It is also recognized that in men-dominated positions, the promotion of women is lower due to the lower pool of women within those positions. Furthermore, respondents believe that to grow their career they need to perform well and to speak up about their career aspirations. There are comments regarding the need to have more transparency on possibilities for career options or paths and the need to have the opportunity to voice their career aspirations. As expressed by some female managers, in terms of career progression, there is the expectation of programs that will allow women to come out and talk about their aspirations. Many of them want to grow their career but do not know how to get there or what is the right career path. Some of them are aware of the importance of having open conversations, allowing them to be openly told how they can do that and being successful in growing their career ladder. Some respondents also shared their perception that within the organization, decision-making about promotion, talent identification, and succession planning, often lies in the forum in which most members are men. This started in the talent identification process which links to succession planning, those potential talents are called key players. The

pipeline of female key players and overall potential succession plan are tracked by the HR team, but prior there are other discussions where the decision-making power at those forums still lies with the majority of men. In addition, respondents see that female senior leaders who are on the Management Committee still rely on external hiring, rather than the success in developing female managers from within.

## **Resources**

Some available resources at work enable female managers to perform and further develop their careers. The first resource is the regular training and development programs provided by the organization. There are different types of programs depending on the position and level of the individuals. The second resource is the direct manager (leader) who plays a key role in determining the career of the individual since they are the ones who evaluate the performance of the individual and they are also the ones who provide recommendations for promotion or any career changes. Most respondents confirm that the role of the direct manager, whom they call N+1 in this company, is important for the success of performing the work and for further career development. The Direct Manager is believed to be fair and unbiased in evaluating the performance of the team. Those female managers appreciate leaders who are transparent with them, whom they can build a good rapport with and those who encourage and give them direction on their career growth.

“I've always had my n+1 who has been very transparent with me. So, with them, I have the rapport, rapport where I can be as I am today... N+1 is his responsibility to make sure I know where I'm heading, or probably he is the liaison between me and the organization. So, I think it is a very important role. And also like your daily, uh, peace of mind depends a lot on your n plus one. That's true. Yeah.” (Naya, single, India).

However, they notice there are some leaders, both male and female, who are not aware of the specific needs of women, which may affect their performance in certain aspects. For example, when a woman has a monthly period (menstruation) and experiences cramps, they will be required to stay at home and do the work from home. Some respondents perceive male leaders as less sensitive, and they are afraid that they will not understand or worse give them wrong judgment when they share their challenges in handling domestic responsibilities. In general, female leaders are perceived as having more proximity and understanding of the situation and challenges faced by female managers, hence they are considered as more supportive and nurturing. The third resource to foster good performance and career for these female managers is the presence of other more experienced and successful female managers and leaders within the organization. When facing specific challenges at work, women often turn to their female colleagues or more experienced female managers, hence the women tribe is another form of resource that can support female managers at work. More experienced and successful female managers and leaders are considered a source of inspiration and motivation for female managers to develop further their careers. For example, when a respondent sees a senior female leader having two kids, and being able to work 12 hours a day, has inspired her to be able to like her, having the ability to balance work and her domestic responsibilities.

## **Organisation norms**

The culture of the organization is influenced by the nature of the fast-moving cosmetics goods as very dynamic and keeps changing driven by the trend, innovation, and demanding consumers. It is a fast-paced organization, where people are expected to do their work at a high speed. Therefore, the organization is very people-driven, less structured, and less hierarchical. There are not too many processes that provide certain autonomy and flexibility in conducting the work as it is very linked to the personality and the behaviour of the individual. Some respondents even claim that it is so people driven, that there are certain things that only they can do and no



others within the organization, hence the situation may create problems when they are absent or not coming to work.

“Here is a very people-driven organization. So, it's not too much of processes, not too many set templates, set routines, et cetera. So, um, what ends up happening is a lot of your experience with a certain manager over a certain role is very linked to the personality and the behaviour of the manager.” (Dita, married, India)

Such culture is believed to open more opportunities for women, if they first perform well in their current role, have the right relationship with leaders, as well as decision-making leaders, and lastly dare to speak up about their career aspirations, the chances to develop their career is there. In general, female managers believe the organization provides such an open culture enabling everyone to be the person that they want to be, with no judgments at all. There are women with different hair colours or with different styles of hair and various attires. They consider the company as a very refreshing space, and workspace to be in because they don't have to think about anything else but work, hence they feel empowered as female managers.

### **Consciousness**

Most respondents think that their performance is first and foremost very much driven by themselves. They are aware that it is very important to firstly be very good at a job and then to get recognized for it, before then they can rely on the rest of the policies to grow their career. Another important aspect is to take good care of their health, both physically and mentally. External factors such as the company benefits, and facilities, are good but if women don't have the motivation to live healthily or maintain their lifestyle accordingly, it will eventually affect their work performance. There is also the consciousness among these female managers that they must have ambition.

They are aware that they cannot rely only on luck or opportunity to be in a certain position, but they must put hard work and effort into doing their best to get the required work performance allowing them to further grow their career. Some respondents expressed the influence of the social culture on the performance and career of women. In both countries, there are women with good educational backgrounds, having big dreams, but they still must sacrifice because of the family pressure to stay at home and to take care of the family. There is also the motivation that comes from the fact that the government does not provide sufficient security hence this condition encourages these female managers to work at the company to reach financial independence. Finally, many of those female managers mentioned that it's very important for women to confidently voice out their career aspirations. Many of them have the consciousness of owning certain personalities, such as extroverts always voice out whenever they want something or when they think something can be done better, especially about growing their career. So, the belief is that having the right performance, the opportunity, and the courage to voice out career aspirations.

“While it was lucky that there was a position for me, I feel like I also, uh, went for it. Like, um, I had all, um, my efforts also did not like to fail me to get to where I am now...to do my best effort despite any challenges that there are.” (Kelly, married, Indonesia)

### **Summary of key findings on ownership of performance and career**

Respondents believe that being in a cosmetics company with high fast-paced business has led the organization to have a culture that builds a very people-driven and less structured or hierarchical organization. This opens women to more opportunities for growing their careers. It is mentioned during FGD and individual interviews that firstly they must perform well, and it is also important to speak up about their career aspirations. In other words, they must have ownership of their performance and career. In growing career and promotion, most respondents believe that the

company is fair and applies equal opportunity for all. It is also recognized that in certain positions with a majority of men, the promotion of women is lower which is due to the lower pool of women within those positions. Their leaders also play a key role in ensuring they can perform well and continue to grow their careers. In addition, the presence of female senior leaders is believed to be their source of career aspirations and motivation to continue their career development journey.

“...talking to women leaders in the country and abroad and just learning from them and getting to like be a part of such programs is going to be great. And ...there are definitely women who are loving to explore such opportunities...” (Business Manager, married, India).

### ***1.3. Digital capability and innovation***

The other theme merging from a series of FGD sessions and interviews is the awareness that to perform well in today’s digital era, digital capability and innovation are important. The following section is the elaboration of digital capability and innovation on company policies, resources, organization norms, and consciousness.

#### **Company’s policies**

As a global leader in the cosmetics industry, the organization has been committed to being at the frontline of digital transformation in the industry and always striving to be the first in developing digital technology. The company has put massive investments in developing beauty-tech with digital technology, and in developing the digital capability of its employees, as part of its digital transformation strategy. The company believes that digital technology is beyond just e-commerce or selling online through the Internet. Digital technology is a way to enhance its relationships with consumers, and its employees at the same time. The company is very focused on driving this technological transformation, as seen by how the company invests in this technology. All respondents agree that digital technology and its progress at work has been felt at the company and as female managers, they see digital transformation as an area that is applied to everyone within the organization, without any gender specificities.

#### **Resources**

The group believes that digital technology is the way to move forward and is key for sustaining business growth. Therefore, the first resource provided by the company is the digital technology that is embedded in everyday working contexts, including in the communication system and various interactive media with consumers. For example, the company provides technology that allows everyone to work and communicate from anywhere. The second resource is the various programs to improve digital capabilities provided by the company. Everyone in the organization can access various information and learning resources which are available in the company’s online system. Having this online training system is highly appreciated by female managers as it allows the flexibility to access them according to their preferred timing, hence it may support their work–life balance. Additionally, there are some important and more complex topics related to digital, that require HR to organize in-class training programs, inviting those who are relevant to the position and function. Unfortunately, as the format is in-class programs, it does not offer flexibility. Considering that digital technology is not a natural topic for women in general, there are some uncomfortable feelings and reluctance from female managers to adopt it. Therefore, the third resource required by female managers to develop their digital innovative behaviour is the influence of leaders, who will encourage their female team members to accept and adapt to digital technology.

“.. Of course, most of us have also gone through this phase where we felt resistance towards the transition that is happening... And we also understand in the professional context that a lot of times with the digital changes that are coming up aren't the smoothest experiences, which brings in hesitation and the reluctance in adoption, immediate adoption, or old adoption of these measures.” (FGD India)

### **Organisation norms**

Some respondents say that digital capability among women in both countries is much influenced by social culture, whereby it is natural for men to discuss and explore on technology matters, unlike women who are not naturally interested in technology. This is perhaps due to the way they were educated since childhood, where things or activities are allocated according to their gender. For example, growing up girls would be given dolls and boys would be given gadgets, so starting from there it affected the mindset as they grow older. In general, female managers are aware that traditionally men are more interested in the latest technologies or the latest digital innovations, meanwhile, women's interests are in other areas such as fashion and beauty. Therefore, it is more challenging for women, it requires more effort for them to develop an interest, to learn and to adopt digital technology.

“I feel like traditionally men feel that they're more, uh, interested in, in the latest technologies, the latest digital innovations and women's interests, um, you know, lie in other areas or they may not be so interested in...” (Marketing Manager, single, India)

### **Consciousness**

All respondents are aware that today they must accept and continue to learn to use and apply digital technologies at work. They believe that it is an important factor to enable them to perform optimally and that it will make their life easier, although requiring them to adapt and change is not always an easy process. These female managers acknowledge and accept that digital is the way forward and that there's no escaping it. They are aware that is not completely out of the blue that they need to upscale their digital capability, although they are not comfortable and most of them have experienced the phase when they felt resistance towards the transition as it is happening. They understand in the professional context that a lot of times the digital changes that are coming up are not the smoothest experiences, which brings in hesitation. However, eventually, they are happy to adopt digital learning because it makes their life easier and helps improve their productivity or performance. Despite the awareness of the necessity to embrace digital technology, most respondents agree that compared to men, women are not naturally lured towards technology matters, including digital. Some female managers see the inhibition in women as higher as compared to the inhibition in men concerning technology in general and digital specifically. Men and women are both afraid of embracing a new technology or a new software, but the fear of adapting is higher in women than in men. There is a suggestion to integrate digital with things which are more of interest for women, such as in the beauty space, for example with a diagnosis tool that makes scalp diagnosis easier, this may help increase the interest and comfort for women in embracing this new digital technology.

### **Summary of key findings on digital capability and innovation**

All respondents are aware that digital transformation has been an important agenda for the company. It is necessary, not only for the growth of the business and sustainability of the company but as well as to better serve its consumers. Furthermore, digital transformation is a source of improving the way they work and its effectiveness. The group has invested in technology and training programs to improve the capabilities of its employees. Despite understanding and

accepting its importance, most female managers interviewed except those whose roles are directly related to digital technology, admitted that for women digital technology is not a topic that they are naturally fond of, unlike with their male coworkers.

#### **1.4. Support system.**

The following section is the elaboration of a support system on company policies, resources, organization norms, and consciousness.

#### **Company's policies**

Among the company's policies which are most relevant to support employees, both female and male, in balancing or integrating their professional and personal lives are work-life balance policies that include policies such as maternity leaves which are beyond the local regulation, with India providing six months leaves, while Indonesia offers four months leaves. Paternity leave of six weeks is also provided for male employees to accompany their wives in taking care of the newborn baby. Flexible working is offered to most employees with exception due to the nature work of certain roles at the plant and warehouse; this flexibility allows employees the option of the ability to work from home or from anywhere and to have the flexibility to come to the office within a certain range of hours. So, this policy covers both flexibility in terms of work-location, and flexibility in terms of hours to come to the office. The other policy is regarding child support, with India having a day-care facility, while in Indonesia it is in the form of financial support through a flexible benefit mechanism. All respondents agree that the policies and practices are there and that it is considered very progressive, specifically in caregiving and providing policies to support women including those who transition into new mothers. In comparison to the local industry benchmark, the company is considered advanced in putting family orientation and the importance of supporting working women.

“In terms of benefits, the facilitation already accommodates women's needs, for example when we are on menstrual leave, marital leave, medical leave. So, in my opinion, the company is very inclined towards making it wealthy... to improve the welfare of its female employees”. (FGD, Indonesia)

However, they are aware that some practices depend on the portion of the manager and the team. For example, when women come back from maternity there is no consistent or standardized process, the expectation must be tempered since each woman may have different complications post-pregnancy, they will not recover at the same pace, and they may face issues related to mental health. Some managers and teams seem to understand this situation, but others seem not aware of this situation and just expect them to work and perform as before immediately upon return from maternity. In addition to work-life balance policies, there are employee benefits that support employees in doing their parental and other domestic responsibilities, which in some areas are even beyond what is required by the law. However, there is also input regarding certain policies which are not consistently applied across the organization. In terms of benefits, these female managers feel that the facilitation already accommodates women's needs, for example with menstrual leave, marital leave, and medical leave, which shows that the company is very inclined towards improving the welfare of its female employees. However, there are certain benefits which are not provided consistently everywhere, such as the type of medical check-ups for women in some regions and the transition for women returning from maternity leave. For example, in India, regarding the annual health checkups, there are specific concerns which are not addressed in up-country areas, such as mammograms and pap smears.

## **Resources**

All respondents recognize and appreciate the policies and benefits provided by the company, allowing them to balance and integrate their professional and personal responsibilities. As mentioned above, they recognized that support at work is expected from their leaders, by providing understanding when they have to come later or leave earlier from the office due to domestic duties calls. In addition, at work, they also recognize the importance of having supportive female colleagues. Meanwhile, at home, as previously mentioned it is important to have a husband or family members to share the domestic responsibilities.

Many respondents mentioned the need to get support from their women peers and mentoring from more experienced female peers. Those female managers expect to have female colleagues or mentorship from more senior female managers, who have gone through several stages to be in their current position, so they can talk through different points of view, especially sharing about how they overcame some of the difficulties based on their experience.

“I think, uh, you know, like a sense of community helps... because I am surrounded with, by like-minded women who also share a life goal and ambition like me, and we end up having those conversations, I draw a lot of inspiration and self-confidence from those conversations. Also, with my fellow women pulling me up...” (Tara, HR, married, India)

## **Organisation norms**

Commonly, female managers who are married and have children may require more flexibility at work. They may request to come to the office later or to do work from home due to their managing their domestic responsibilities. In this context, there is understanding from their leaders and from their colleagues. For example, a female manager who is still breastfeeding one of her children mentioned to her managers that, she cannot attend the company’s activities or business trips that require her to stay overnight; hence during a team bonding activity, she was excused to go home and required only to attend part of the program regarding the business meeting. It is in the culture of both Indonesia and India, that women are the main ones responsible for taking care of domestic issues. In Indonesia and India, there is still the perspective that women must take care of all the work in their house, such as cleaning up the house and making sure that there is food for the family. In addition, the perception is that women are responsible for taking care of the children in the family and they are expected to do that well. So, the culture of both countries is still very much that the women do the large part of the household course, in this context, it is a patriarchy-driven culture, although things are slowly changing, as some families are more progressive and have shared responsibilities with men. Few interviewees testified that their husbands are willing to co-share the responsibilities of taking care of children. This is certainly an important pillar in their support system. A female manager in India mentioned that she and her husband are perhaps in the top one percentile family where the husband is willing to bathe the kids and feed them.

## **Consciousness**

All respondents are conscious of the challenges they are facing being female managers, especially since there are more challenges they must face after married and having children. The challenge is basically in integrating their professional and personal responsibilities. They recognize the need to have a support system at work, to allow them to meet the expected performance and to have the support at home for addressing various domestics’ responsibilities. Domestic support here includes support that they receive to manage household matters and children, from direct family members such as parents, spouse or husband, and nanny or paid child-care. For example, there are female managers whose support system at home includes some of her



family members, such as her husband and her mother, added with professional caretakers (nannies).

The most important support at home is obviously from the husband or partner, as they can share the responsibility. There is an example of a female manager whose husband also works, but they manage to arrange in such a way that in the morning the husband oversees the household and the children and in the evening the wife takes turns. Another female manager has arranged the support system at home completely through a professional caretaker, one for each of her two children.

### **Summary of key findings on the support system**

Female managers need support from the company in the form of policies or benefits, and at work through their leaders, and peers, especially female peers. In addition, they also require support from the family back at home, to share the responsibilities in managing the household or in taking care of their family. The challenge is considering the presence of stigma in both countries, with the belief that women are the main ones responsible for taking care of the family and household.

“My support system is, while my mother stays very close to us. So, on the days when the nanny doesn't turn up or the child is sick or there's something wrong, I have someone to lean on. My partner is also quite supportive. He's in a sales role, so his work is also super hectic, but he starts his day late and his day ends late. So, the morning is when he's the captain of the ship, and evening is when I'm captain of the ship.” (Finance Manager, married, 2 kids, India).

### **Discussion**

This section discusses further the results as explained in the previous sections, discovering the various parties which have influence in the context and the kind of environment that may foster the performance of female managers. Limitations and suggestions for future research are included at the end of this section.

#### **1.1 Parties influencing the performance of female managers.**

Based on the gathered insights from a series of FGD sessions and interviews, we can also identify the different parties influencing the performance of female managers. The first key factor influencing the performance of female managers is themselves. Performance can only be achieved if they have the right motivation, willing to put in the right efforts and have the right mindset as well as the confidence to voice out their opinions, challenges, and aspirations. This finding supports the result of a previous study that self-motivation among the key determinants of female employees' job performance (Kamaruddin et al., [2021](#)) In the context of female managers, past studies found that internal resources with psychological capital are crucial to address challenges they face at work (Scholarios & Taylor, [2011](#); Hartman & Barber, [2020](#)). The other important party is the family with a spouse or husband, especially when they have children or other dependents to take care of. Having support from the family will enable female managers to manage their dual responsibilities at home and in the office. This finding is consistent with results from the previous study on the support required by working women (Babic & Hansez, [2021](#); Soeters et al., [2021](#)). Next, consider the culture in both countries where the society demands women or wives as the main responsibility for taking care of children and the household of the family. It is important to be in a society that supports working women in general. These female managers need to be in an organization with a more progressive culture which shares gender equality values. As shown in the study by Bajdo and Dickson ([2001](#)) aspects of organizational culture typically associated with women will help them to progress. At the office among the most important parties that affect

female managers' performance is their leaders, especially direct managers. They are the ones who evaluate their day-to-day performance and open opportunities for career enhancement. In addition, leaders are also the source of their encouragement and support. This finding is consistent with previous studies that found leaders play a key role for women at work, from providing opportunities for development and career enhancement to gender equality policies' implementation in the workplace in general (Mohammadkhani & Gholamzadeh, [2016](#); London et al., 2019; Taplett et al., [2022](#)). This study gathered insight that these female managers also require support from their female peers or co-workers, more specifically in addressing issues faced by women at work. Thus, female managers require support not only from their family and leaders but also from peers, as found in a previous study by Beba & Church ([2020](#)). Finally, the presence of senior female leaders – role models are very important as source of encouragement and aspiration, which is needed especially when they face challenges at work and to gain confidence in developing their careers. This finding is consistent with the result of a previous study, where female leaders attract more women to perform and grow their careers in surgery (Moulton et al., [2013](#)).

## **1.2. Environment affecting the performance of female managers.**

From the insights above, we can conclude two environments are influencing the performance of female managers i.e., the personal environment at home and the professional environment at the workplace. The explanation is as follows.

### **Personal environment at home**

There is firstly the influence of the personal environment at home due to the strong influence of society. The social culture of the countries, both Indonesia and India demand women or wives as the main responsible for taking care of children and the household of the family. It is difficult for female managers to perform well at work when they are not supported by family or spouses who are willing to share domestic responsibilities (Babic & Hansez, [2021](#); Soeters et al., [2021](#)). Therefore, it is apparent that female managers who are still single and have no dependents are having fewer challenges related to family issues at home. On the other hand, those who are married and have family to take care of at home face more challenges in integrating their responsibilities at home and work. They need support from their spouse or family to share this responsibility, or the other common solution is to hire paid caregivers.

### **Professional environment at the office**

At the office, the environment that enables female managers to perform well and to continue to excel in their career is an environment that upholds gender equality principles, by all stakeholders, mainly this is driven by the leaders and HR (Human Resources department). In addition, the favourable working environment is that allows women to integrate their personal and professional responsibilities, through relevant policies and employee benefits. These findings are aligned with previous studies on female leadership having a positive association with working attitude and performance (Costantini et al., [2020](#); Chawla & Sharma, [2019](#)). Furthermore, the working environment with the right organisational norms and culture, where there is transparency and that everyone respects and supports each other, is also evident in the past study (Kamaruddin et al., [2021](#)). Considering the challenge faced by female managers, they need to gain support from other female colleagues at work. Lastly, an environment with role models by senior female leaders also brings the source of motivation and aspirations for female managers to continue performing well and grow their careers further (Moulton et al., [2013](#)).

## **CONCLUSION**

Understanding the supporting environment and the different parties influencing the performance of female managers, we can conclude that the ecosystem influencing female managers' performance is an ecosystem that meets some criteria. First, it is an ecosystem that provides good gender equality perception, a workplace that is also gender-responsive, this will boost the consciousness and confidence of female managers to perform well and further grow their careers. Second, is an ecosystem that encourages female managers to have ownership and drive their performance and careers. Third, considering the digital context is an ecosystem that enables female managers to gain their confidence and the motivation for the development of their digital capability. Finally, there is the ecosystem that allows female managers to have the right support system, both at work and at home. This ecosystem is aligned with the gender-at-work framework (Rao et al., 2016), as it consists of the different forces within self-consciousness, resources, policies, and the relevant organization norms.

### **Recommendations**

This study provides several practical implications for the attention of the organization. First, the organisation must review the implementation of its policies about gender equality and gender responsiveness, ensuring consistent practices across the company which make female managers feel comfortable being treated equally and fairly to get the opportunity and support at the workplace for their optimal performance (Baker et al., 2019, Dongrey & Rokade, 2022). Organizations must also address the gender disparities situation in functions which are currently dominated by males and develop opportunities to include more females in those functions e.g., field-commercial roles, and certain positions in warehouses. Second, this study reveals that at work female managers require sufficient internal resources e.g., motivation, and self-confidence, which enable them to drive their performance and career progress (Melamed, 1995, Kamaruddin et al., 2021). Therefore, the organisation needs to provide various development programs and working conditions that nurture these internal resources. Third, there is awareness among female managers that digital capability and innovation in this digital era are among the key factors to enable them to perform well at work, but they are behind compared to their male colleagues and need the support of their leaders to accelerate their digital capability. Fourth, considering the stigma present in these regions where women are expected to be the lead responsible for domestic matters, organizations must ensure that there is sufficient support for female managers not only in the forms of policies and benefits but also through supportive leaders. Therefore, regular leadership training with relevant content is needed to ensure people leaders within the organisation have the required skills and understanding of their female members.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

This study has some limitations, such as it is a cross-sectional study where data are gathered within one period (Creswell, 2018). Future research can consider doing a time-series study to see the consistencies of the findings. This study was done in a particular group of a company. Future research can consider doing such a study in other companies within the same industry or other industries to see the general findings across varied organizations and industries. The other limitation of this study is that it applied qualitative that gathered data mostly through interviews and FGD sessions. Future research may consider applying a quantitative method, that will complement findings with statistical analysis providing more comprehensive results about relationships between different factors which may affect the performance of female managers.

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