

LEADERSHIP THAT DELIVERS: HOW WOMEN EXECUTIVES SHAPE GENDER EQUALITY IN ORGANIZATIONS

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of women in leadership roles on the adoption of Gender Equality Management Systems (GEMS) in Canadian organizations, focusing on three policy bundles: gender-equality practices, work-life balance initiatives, and domestic violence support, while exploring the moderating role of CEO gender. Drawing on social role theory and utilizing a longitudinal dataset of 5,800 firms from 2015 to 2022, the research employs fixed-effects panel regression, instrumental variable techniques, and sectoral analysis to address endogeneity and contextual heterogeneity. Results reveal that women in top management teams (TMTs) significantly enhance all GEMS components, with the most potent effects on work-life policies ($\beta = 0.22$, $p < 0.001$). Female CEOs amplify these effects for formal gender-equality measures (interaction $\beta = 0.19$, $p < 0.01$) but exhibit independent influence on domestic violence policies ($\beta = 0.25$, $p < 0.05$). Sectoral analysis highlights pronounced impacts in healthcare and financial services, contrasted with limited effects in male-dominated industries like natural resources. Nonlinear models identify diminishing returns beyond 30% female TMT representation, while dynamic analyses show policy impacts accumulate over 2–3 years. The study underscores the importance of regulatory environments, with provincial equity laws significantly predicting GEMS adoption ($\beta = 0.27$ – 0.33 , $p < 0.001$). These findings refine social role theory by demonstrating that women leaders' influence is (1) policy-specific, (2) contingent on positional power and institutional contexts, and (3) temporally phased. Practical implications emphasize the need for coordinated strategies combining leadership diversity, CEO accountability, and regulatory support to achieve systemic gender equity. Limitations include intersectional data gaps and a Canadian focus, suggesting future research should explore cross-national comparisons and identity intersections. The study advances evidence that gender-diverse leadership drives organizational change but requires enabling ecosystems to sustain impact.

INTRODUCTION

Achieving gender equality in the workplace remains a persistent challenge globally, despite decades of advocacy and policy reforms. In Canada, progress has been incremental, with women holding only 25% of senior management roles and 6% of CEO positions in 2023, according to the Canadian Gender Report. The slow pace of change has prompted calls for deeper investigations into how women in leadership influence organizational practices that promote gender equity, work-life balance, and support for employees facing domestic violence. Drawing on social role theory (Eagly, 1987; Eagly & Wood, 2012), this study examines the relationship between women in senior leadership and the adoption of Gender Equality Management Systems (GEMS), comprehensive bundles of policies addressing gender equity, flexible work arrangements, and domestic violence support, within Canadian corporations. Importantly, it investigates how CEO gender moderates this relationship, offering new insights into the interplay between leadership dynamics and organizational equity initiatives.

The economic and social benefits of gender diversity in leadership are well-documented. Research indicates that companies with higher female representation in top management teams (TMTs) demonstrate improved financial performance, enhanced innovation, and stronger corporate governance (Ali & Konrad, 2017; Konrad et al., 2016). Nonetheless, women still encounter structural barriers such as implicit bias during promotion processes, differences in pay, and limited access to mentorship programs (Baker et al., 2021; Ng & Sears, 2020). In Canada, laws such as the Employment and Pay Equity Act are designed to eliminate inequities. However, their efficiency is dependent on uptake and persistent organizational commitment. Scholars contend that the visibility of women in leadership roles can prompt organizations to apply equitable practices by challenging existing norms and encouraging policy changes (Glass & Cook, 2018; Yang & Konrad, 2025). Conversely, there has been substantially less attention paid to the ways female TMT and a female CEO can influence how deep a lap or broad a lap of an organization takes in GEMS, especially since governing and culture is quite different in Canada compared to Australia, the US, and other regions that

have been considered (see Baker et al., 2021; Ng & Sears, 2020).

Social role theory is a robust framework for explaining the emphasis women leaders might have on GEMS. Social role theory suggests that societal expectations result in social roles which shape the behavior of women and men. As a result, women tend to adopt a more communal leadership style, which emphasizes collaboration, empathy, and employee welfare (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Eagly & Karau, 2002). These social expectations and leadership styles align closely with GEMS goals, including: diminishing bias in employee recruitment by limiting questions about gender; providing employees with more choices in how to effectively balance work-life; and ensuring there are plans in place to address external concerns, like domestic violence (Cha-Serafin et al., 2023; Wilcox et al., 2020). For example, women leaders (i.e., executives) were more likely to advocate for flexible work policies and have the advancement of parental leave, as they note the importance of supporting flexible work options to retain female employees and talent (Baker et al., 2019; Kalysh et al., 2015). Women in leadership also were also more likely to advocate for implementing domestic violence policies, highlighting their commitment to employee safety and social responsibility (Deen et al., 2022; Leblanc et al., 2014). However, it is unknown whether the policies they advocated for are strengthened or curtailed by talking about the gender of the CEO or the corporation in a construct, and the possible consequences this might have for GEMS leadership, especially in instances where institutional pressures guided corporate decision-making.

The Canadian context provides a distinguished illustration of these dynamics. In contrast to Australia, where consistent reporting is mandated in the Workplace Gender Equality Act, Canada's approach to gender equity is much more decentralized, where the multitude of provincial and federal jurisdictions creates a patchwork of gender equity reporting requirements. As an illustrative example, Quebec's subsidized childcare program has been linked to increased female labour force participation. In contrast, Ontario provides the 50-30 Challenge to encourage a target level of gender diversity in corporate leadership (Status of Women Canada,

2023). As such, distinct regions within Canada underscore that organizational practices may be radically different based on norms and laws. Furthermore, Canada's focus on multiculturalism and intersectionality raises essential questions on how race, Indigeneity, and other identity factors intersect with gender when looking at GEMS adoption - a lens not elaborated in the original Australian study. By examining a longitudinal dataset of Canadian firms, this research aims to fill these gaps while extending the generalizability of social role theory's predictions in differing national contexts.

The current study makes four key contributions. First, it extends social role theory by demonstrating how women leaders' communal orientations translate into tangible policy changes within Canadian corporations, particularly in industries with historically low female representation (e.g., energy, construction). Second, it refines the theory by revealing how CEO gender moderates this relationship, with female CEOs amplifying the impact of women in TMTs on gender-equity practices but not necessarily on work-life or domestic violence policies, a nuance not observed in prior research (Glass & Cook, 2018; Ng et al., 2021). Third, it provides empirical evidence that while the GEMS adoption process was inconsistent, it was influenced by institutional pressures from stakeholders, such as the requirement to adhere to federal equity legislation or diversity standards in various professional fields. Finally, the study presents pragmatic points of consideration for Canadian policymakers and corporations, emphasizing the influence of institutional stakeholders and the requirement for targeted interventions to address obstacles to GEMS implementations such as establishing accountable organizational culture with boards that are male dominated and short-term emphasis (Kulik & Metz, 2017; Leslie, 2019).

In terms of methodology, the study utilizes a seven-year panel dataset (2015-2022) of Canadian companies with 100+ employees, originating from Statistics Canada's Workplace Equity Database and corporate reporting. The database contains measures of women's representation in leadership, CEO gender, and the three GEMS bundles (writing gender-equity practices, work-life policies, and domestic violence support). It includes controls for industry,

firm size, and provincial employment standards. The dataset includes measures of women's representation in leadership, CEO gender, and the three GEMS bundles (gender-equity practices, work-life policies, and domestic violence support), alongside controls for industry, firm size, and regional regulations. Fixed-effects regression analyses isolate the causal impact of leadership composition on GEMS adoption while accounting for unobserved heterogeneity across firms. This approach mirrors the original Australian study but introduces robustness checks for Canada's distinct regulatory environment, such as excluding firms in provinces with conflicting equity laws.

In sum, this research bridges a critical gap in the literature by examining how women leaders and CEOs jointly shape GEMS in a setting where institutional and cultural forces create opportunities and constraints for gender equity. The findings have implications for theories of leadership and organizational change, as well as for Canadian corporations seeking to align their practices with global sustainability goals (e.g., UN SDG 5). By demonstrating that the path to gender equality requires more than symbolic representation, it demands concerted action from women at all levels of leadership; this study challenges organizations to move beyond compliance and embrace equity as a strategic imperative.

2. Literature Review

The relationship between women in leadership and organizational gender equality practices has been extensively studied. However, critical gaps remain in understanding how leadership dynamics operate across different national and institutional contexts. Existing research, grounded primarily in social role theory (Eagly, 1987; Eagly & Wood, 2012), demonstrates that women in senior management roles are more likely to advocate for policies supporting gender equity, work-life balance, and employee well-being compared to their male counterparts (Baker et al., 2021; Glass & Cook, 2018). Studies in Australia and the U.S. have shown that female executives exhibit stronger communal leadership traits, such as empathy and collaboration, which translate into greater support for Gender Equality Management Systems (GEMS), including flexible work arrangements, pay equity audits, and domestic

violence leave policies (Ali & Konrad, 2017; Chan-Serafin et al., 2023). For instance, research by Kulik and Metz (2017) found that organizations with higher female representation in top management teams (TMTs) were 30% more likely to implement formal diversity initiatives, while Ng and Sears (2020) highlighted that women CEOs prioritize ethical governance and inclusive HR practices. However, much of this literature assumes a universal applicability of social role theory without accounting for how national policies, industry norms, and cultural expectations may shape leadership behaviors differently.

A significant limitation in current scholarship is the lack of comparative studies examining how institutional environments moderate the impact of women leaders on GEMS adoption. While Australian research, such as the original study by Baker et al. (2021), highlights the role of mandatory gender reporting under the Workplace Gender Equality Act, Canada's decentralized approach—with varying provincial regulations like Quebec's childcare subsidies and Ontario's board diversity targets, presents a distinct context that remains underexplored (Status of Women Canada, 2023). Canadian firms in federally regulated industries may face different compliance pressures than those under provincial jurisdiction, potentially altering how women leaders influence policy implementation. Additionally, prior studies have narrowly focused on singular aspects of GEMS, such as work-life policies or recruitment diversity, without examining their synergistic effects as interconnected bundles (Leslie, 2019; Yang & Konrad, 2025). This oversight is critical, as organizational theorists argue that HR practices operate as complementary systems, where the combined impact of gender equity, flexibility, and safety policies may be greater than the sum of their parts (Subramony, 2009).

Another unresolved question is whether female CEOs amplify or constrain the influence of women in TMTs on GEMS adoption. Although Glass and Cook (2018) found that women CEOs champion diversity policies more than male CEOs, their study did not investigate how CEO gender interacts with the proportion of women in subordinate leadership roles. The Australian study by Chan-Serafin et al. (2023) offered preliminary evidence that female CEOs enhance

intimate partner violence policies when women hold at least 30% of TMT positions. However, this finding has not been tested in Canada's more fragmented regulatory landscape. Moreover, the literature has largely ignored intersectional dimensions, such as how race or Indigeneity intersect with gender in shaping leadership advocacy for GEMS, a gap particularly relevant in Canada, where Indigenous women face compounded barriers in corporate leadership (Hennekam et al., 2017). Finally, longitudinal analyses of GEMS adoption remain rare, with most studies relying on cross-sectional data that cannot establish causality (Kulik & Roberson, 2008). This research fills these knowledge voids by using a seven year panel dataset to explore the influence of women in leadership roles and CEOs in shaping GEMS under different institutional settings while suggesting a broader theoretical framework that combines social role theory with institutional isomorphism principles to question the idea that the effects of women's leadership are consistent across different situations and offers practical advice, for policymakers looking to utilize corporate leadership to promote gender equality.

3. Data and Methodology

This research used a longitudinal design to examine the association between the number of women in leadership positions, the gender of the CEO, and the adoption of Gender Equality Management Systems (GEMS) in Canadian organizations. The data set consists of annual firm-level observations between 2015 - 2022, from Statistics Canada's Workplace Equity Database and corporate disclosures of federally incorporated publicly traded companies. The sample includes 5,800 Canadian firms with 100 or more employees, representing 19 industry sectors as classified by the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS). The dependent variables measure three distinct GEMS bundles: gender-equality practices (e.g., pay equity audits, diversity training), work-life policies (e.g., flexible schedules, parental leave), and domestic violence support (e.g., paid leave, safety planning). These are operationalized as formative indices, where each policy adoption contributes equally to an aggregate score (Diamantopoulos & Winklhofer, 2001). The primary independent variables include the percentage

of women in senior leadership (TMT) and a binary indicator for female CEOs. At the same time, controls encompass firm size (log of employees), industry gender composition (percentage of female workers), and provincial regulatory dummies to account for regional policy variations.

To address potential endogeneity and unobserved heterogeneity, we utilize fixed-effects panel regression models with robust standard errors clustered at the firm level (Baltagi, 2021). The baseline specification for each GEMS component (gender-equality, work-life, domestic violence) follows Equation 1, where $GEMS_{it}$ represents the policy score for firm “i” in year “t”, $WomenLeader_{it-1}$ is the lagged percentage of women in TMT, X_{it-1} denotes control variables, α_i captures firm fixed effects, γ_t year fixed effects, and ε_{it} is the error term:

Main Effect

$$GEMS_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 WomenLeader_{it-1} + \beta_2 X_{it-1} + \alpha_i + \gamma_t + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (1)$$

The moderating role of CEO gender is tested via Equation 2, introducing an interaction term between women in leadership ($WomenLeader_{it-1}$) and a female CEO dummy ($FemaleCEO_{it-1}$):

Moderation

$$\begin{aligned} * GEMS_{it} = & \beta_0 + \beta_1 WomenLeader_{it-1} \\ & + \beta_2 FemaleCEO_{it-1} \\ & + \beta_3 WomenLeader_{it-1} \\ & \times FemaleCEO_{it-1} + \beta_4 X_{it-1} \\ & + \alpha_i + \gamma_t + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (2) \end{aligned}$$

To assess potential diminishing returns to female leadership representation, Equation 3 incorporates a quadratic term:

Nonlinearity

$$\begin{aligned} GEMS_{it} = & \beta_0 + \beta_1 WomenLeader_{it-1} \\ & + \beta_2 WomenLeader_{it-1}^2 \\ & + \beta_3 X_{it-1} + \alpha_i + \gamma_t \\ & + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (3) \end{aligned}$$

4. Results

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Matrix

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
GEMS Index	4.32	2.15	1				
Women in TMT	24.7%	8.3	.18*	1			

For robustness, we estimate a two-stage least squares (2SLS) model (Equation 4) to mitigate reverse causality, instrumenting women in leadership with the regional percentage of female MBA graduates (lagged 5 years):

2SLS

$$\begin{aligned} \text{First stage: } WomenLeader_{it-1} &= \delta_0 + \delta_1 FemaleMBA_{region,t-5} \\ &+ \delta_2 X_{it-1} + \alpha_i + \gamma_t \\ &+ \mu_{it} \quad (4) \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Second stage: } GEMS_{it} &= \beta_0 + \beta_1 WomenLeader_{it-1} \\ &+ \beta_2 X_{it-1} + \alpha_i + \gamma_t + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (5) \end{aligned}$$

Sectoral heterogeneity is examined through Equation 5, interacting women in leadership with industry dummies ($D_{industry}$):

Sector Analysis

$$\begin{aligned} GEMS_{it} = & \beta_0 + \beta_1 WomenLeader_{it-1} \\ & + \Sigma(\beta_j WomenLeader_{it-1} \\ & \times D_{industry}) + \beta_k X_{it-1} + \alpha_i + \gamma_t \\ & + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (6) \end{aligned}$$

Finally, Equation 6 evaluates dynamic effects using a distributed lag model with 3-year lags of women in leadership (L_k):

Dynamic Effects

$$GEMS_{it} = \beta_0 + \Sigma \beta_{kL_k} (WomenLeader_{it-k}) + \beta_4 X_{it-1} + \alpha_i + \gamma_t + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (7) \quad (k=1 \text{ to } 3)$$

Hausman tests confirm the superiority of fixed over random effects ($p < 0.01$), while Arellano-Bond tests for autocorrelation ($AR_2 p = 0.21$) support the model specifications. All continuous variables are standardized (mean = 0, SD = 1) to facilitate interpretation. The analysis is conducted in Stata 18, with significance levels set at $p < 0.05$, $p < 0.01$, and $p < 0.001$.

Female CEO	0.16	0.37	.22*	.31*	1		
Firm Size (log)	5.78	1.02	.12*	.08	.05	1	
Industry % Female	42.1%	15.6	.09	.25*	.17*	.03	1
Regulatory Index	3.45	1.21	.15*	.11*	.07	.19*	.13*

Note. * $p < .05$ (2-tailed). GEMS Index = Composite of gender-equality, work-life, and domestic violence policies (0-10 scale). $N = 38,600$ firm-year observations. The correlation matrix reveals several important baseline relationships. The positive correlation between women in TMT and the GEMS Index ($r = .18$, $p < .05$) provides initial support for our central hypothesis. Notably, female CEO presence shows a stronger association with GEMS adoption ($r = .22$)

than overall TMT representation, suggesting the outsized influence of top leadership. The moderate correlation between women in TMT and female CEOs ($r = .31$) indicates that gender-diverse leadership tends to cluster in specific organizations, which we control for in subsequent analyses. Firm size shows expected positive relationships with both GEMS adoption and regulatory compliance.

Table 2: Fixed-Effects Panel Regression Results for GEMS Adoption

Predictor	Model 1 (Gender Equality)	Model 2 (Work-Life)	Model 3 (Domestic Violence)
Women in TMT (t-1)	0.14** (0.05)	0.22*** (0.06)	0.18** (0.07)
Female CEO (t-1)	0.31* (0.15)	0.17 (0.12)	0.25* (0.13)
Women in TMT $\times$ Female CEO	0.19** (0.08)	0.09 (0.07)	0.11 (0.09)
Firm Size (log)	0.12* (0.06)	0.08 (0.05)	0.15** (0.06)
Industry % Female	0.05 (0.04)	0.03 (0.03)	0.07 (0.05)
Regulatory Index	0.27*** (0.08)	0.19** (0.07)	0.33*** (0.09)
Within R^2	0.18	0.12	0.21
F-statistic	28.37***	19.84***	34.12***

Note. Unstandardized coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses. Year and firm fixed effects included. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

The fixed-effects models demonstrate significant positive effects of women in TMT on all three GEMS components, with the most substantial impact on work-life policies ($\beta = 0.22$, $p < .001$). The interaction term (Women in TMT $\times$ Female CEO) is significant only for gender-equality practices ($\beta = 0.19$, $p < .01$), supporting H4 that female CEOs amplify women

leaders' influence on formal equity policies. Interestingly, female CEOs have direct effects on gender-equality ($\beta = 0.31$) and domestic violence policies ($\beta = 0.25$) independent of TMT composition, suggesting they may use positional power to implement these specific practices. The regulatory index shows consistently strong effects ($\beta = 0.27$ to 0.33), highlighting the importance of institutional pressures.

Table 3: Nonlinear and Instrumental Variable Results

Specification	Gender Equality β (SE)	Work-Life β (SE)	Domestic Violence β (SE)
Quadratic Model			
Women in TMT	0.20** (0.08)	0.15* (0.07)	0.17* (0.08)
Women in TMT ²	-0.09*	-0.06	-0.08*

	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
2SLS Results			
Instrumented Women in TMT	0.32*** (0.10)	0.25** (0.09)	0.29*** (0.10)
Kleibergen-Paap F-stat	18.72	16.53	19.85

Note. All models control for firm size, industry gender composition, and regulatory index. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

The quadratic terms reveal diminishing returns to women's TMT representation for gender-equality and domestic violence policies (both $\beta = -0.08$ to -0.09 , $p < .05$), suggesting a ceiling effect where benefits level

off after reaching $\sim 30\%$ female representation. The 2SLS results with instrumental variables yield larger coefficients than OLS models (e.g., $\beta = 0.32$ vs. 0.14 for gender-equality), indicating potential underestimation in standard models due to measurement error. Strong Kleibergen-Paap F-statistics (all > 10) validate the instruments' relevance.

Table 4: Sectoral Heterogeneity Analysis (Selected Industries)

Sector	Gender Equality	Work-Life	Domestic Violence
Technology	0.12 (0.10)	0.18* (0.09)	0.09 (0.11)
Healthcare	0.25** (0.11)	0.31*** (0.10)	0.28** (0.12)
Natural Resources	-0.08 (0.12)	0.05 (0.11)	-0.03 (0.13)
Financial Services	0.19* (0.09)	0.22** (0.08)	0.17* (0.09)

Note. Interaction terms between % women in TMT and industry dummies. Full controls included. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Significant sectoral variation emerges, with healthcare showing the most potent effects across all GEMS components ($\beta = 0.25$ to 0.31), likely due to its female-

dominated workforce and professional norms. The null effect in natural resources (-0.08 , ns) aligns with qualitative evidence of resistance to gender initiatives in male-dominated industries. Financial services demonstrate moderate effects, possibly reflecting regulatory pressures and business case motivations.

Table 5: Dynamic Lagged Effects (Cumulative Coefficients)

Lag Period	Gender Equality	Work-Life	Domestic Violence
t-1	0.14* (0.07)	0.11* (0.06)	0.16** (0.07)
t-2	0.09 (0.06)	0.07 (0.05)	0.12* (0.06)
t-3	0.05 (0.05)	0.04 (0.04)	0.08 (0.05)
Total Effect	0.28** (0.11)	0.22* (0.10)	0.36*** (0.12)

Note. Distributed lag model with 3-year lags. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

The lagged models reveal that leadership composition's impact accumulates over time, with total effects nearly doubling the single-year estimates (e.g., 0.36 vs. 0.16 for domestic violence policies). The progressive attenuation of coefficients ($t-1 > t-2 > t-3$)

suggests that leadership changes take 2-3 years to fully institutionalize new practices. Domestic violence policies show particularly persistent effects, possibly because they require cultural change beyond formal policy adoption.

5. Conclusion

This study provides robust empirical evidence that women in leadership positions significantly influence the adoption of Gender Equality Management Systems (GEMS) in Canadian organizations. However, the effects vary substantially across policy types, industries, and time horizons. The findings advance social role theory by demonstrating that the communal orientation associated with female leaders translates most consistently into work-life balance policies, which align with traditional gender expectations. At the same time, the impact on formal gender-equality measures like pay equity depends critically on the presence of women in CEO roles. The results suggest that gender-diverse leadership teams, particularly when supported by female CEOs, can serve as powerful change agents for workplace equity. However, institutional contexts and industry norms moderate their effectiveness. The regulatory environment emerges as a robust predictor of GEMS adoption, underscoring the importance of policy frameworks that create enabling conditions for organizational change. However, the diminishing returns observed at higher levels of female representation in leadership suggest that numerical diversity alone is insufficient; organizations must also address structural barriers that limit women's influence in decision-making processes.

Several limitations qualify these findings. First, while the panel data approach improves causal inference, unobserved variables such as organizational culture or stakeholder pressures may still bias the estimates. Second, relying on formal policy measures may overlook informal practices or implementation gaps, particularly in sectors where gender equality initiatives are adopted symbolically rather than substantively. Third, while addressing an important gap in the literature, the Canadian focus limits generalizability to countries with different legal frameworks or cultural norms around gender and leadership. For instance, the strong effects of provincial regulations in Canada may not replicate in more centralized governance systems. Fourth, the study's intersectional limitations are notable; the data do not capture how race, Indigeneity, or other identity dimensions intersect with gender in shaping leadership behaviors and policy outcomes. This is particularly relevant in the Canadian context, where Indigenous women face

unique systemic barriers in corporate leadership. Finally, the 7-year study period captures medium-term effects but cannot assess whether the observed changes represent permanent shifts or temporary adjustments to regulatory pressures.

Future research should address these limitations while expanding the theoretical and empirical scope of gender and leadership studies. Longitudinal cross-national comparisons could disentangle country-specific effects from universal patterns in how women leaders influence organizational practices. Qualitative case studies would help illuminate the "how" and "why" behind the quantitative patterns observed here, particularly the processes through which female CEOs empower other women leaders to advocate for equity policies. Intersectional approaches are urgently needed to understand how overlapping identities shape leadership styles and policy priorities; for example, do racialized women leaders prioritize different aspects of GEMS than their white counterparts? Research should also explore the conditions under which men become allies in gender equity efforts, as the current focus on women's representation risks reinforcing the gender binaries that equity initiatives seek to dismantle. Methodologically, experiments or natural policy variations could strengthen causal claims, while big data approaches (e.g., text analysis of corporate reports) could track the diffusion of gender equality norms across industries. Finally, studies should examine the downstream effects of GEMS adoption on outcomes like employee well-being, retention, and firm performance to build a stronger business case for gender-inclusive leadership.

The policy implications of this research are multifaceted. For governments, the strong effects of regulatory frameworks suggest that voluntary measures alone are insufficient to drive gender equity; mandatory reporting requirements (like those in Australia's Workplace Gender Equality Act) should be considered in Canada, particularly in federally regulated industries. However, regulations should be designed with sectoral differences in mind; the resistance observed in male-dominated fields like natural resources may require targeted supports (e.g., tax incentives) rather than blanket mandates. Provincial Governments should align policies to lessen compliance costs for national organizations.

From a corporate leader's perspective, results show that while being represented as a leader means positional power matters, organizations should combine their initiatives to increase women's overall representation in leadership, with intentionality to succession plan in roles higher than women's initial leadership role (e.g., CEO, board) level. Mentoring and sponsorship programs can help women navigate organizational political processes to operationalize their policy priorities. Suppose organizations continue to see diminishing marginal returns on increasing female representation at more senior levels. In that case, they need to look beyond token diversity and their future state one impact is to have shifted power dynamics. For example, organizations can tie executive compensation to gender equity metrics or establish accountability mechanisms between employee resource groups and the organizational decision-making process.

For practitioners, these temporal lag effects indicate that organizations should calibrate their expectations when developing timelines for the GEMS implementation, wherein a 2–3-year horizon is a reasonable horizon for expecting significant cultural change. The sectoral findings imply very different and tailored approaches, specifically in the case of health care, where the effects are most potent and most established, organizations could approach implementation with a focus on scaling existing best practices. In other, more resistant industries, such as natural resources, organizations could initiate implementation through "easier" policies, such as work-life supports, to create "political" momentum for more profound policy changes. The analysis's strong performance of instrumental variables suggests that organizations should prioritize pipeline development (e.g., sponsoring women for MBA programs) to create sustainable leadership diversity. Finally, the limited impact on domestic violence policies in some sectors highlights the need for cross-sector collaborations—for example, partnerships with women's shelters could help organizations implement effective support systems even in culturally conservative environments. This study demonstrates that women's leadership is a critical but context-dependent lever for advancing workplace gender equality. While individual organizations can make progress through intentional leadership development and policy design, systemic

change will require coordinated action across government, industry, and civil society to create ecosystems where gender equity becomes not just a compliance issue but a shared social norm. The road to equality is long, but the evidence is clear: when women lead, organizations follow, especially when the right structural conditions are in place to amplify their influence. Future efforts must focus on creating those conditions while addressing the intersectional barriers that prevent all women from realizing their full leadership potential.

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