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**The Role of Sustainable Human Resource Management Practices
in Achieving Gender Equality: A Case Study of a New Zealand
Electricity Distribution Business**

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Abstract

Sustainable human resource management (SHRM) practices played a crucial role in addressing global sustainable development challenges, particularly in the context of complicated gender equality issues. As a result, these practices had garnered significant academic interest. Nevertheless, there was a scarcity of research about the impact of SHRM practices on achieving gender equality in the engineering industry, particularly in the electricity distribution business (EDB) in New Zealand. This research sought to examine the extent to which an EDB in North Island, New Zealand had carried out SHRM practices in line with the characteristics outlined by Mariappanadar (2020). Additionally, it aimed to examine the engineers' awareness of the existence of SHRM practices within the company. Furthermore, it aimed to assess the impact of implementing SHRM practices on promoting gender equality.

This study employed semi-structured interviews with a total of 8 engineers, consisting of 3 female engineers and 5 male engineers, to gather data on the implementation of SHRM practices by EDB owners and managers in order to promote gender equality. The collected data was then subjected to thematic analysis for qualitative analysis. The empirical findings of this research indicated that the EDB had shown a dedication to implementing policies related to work-family balance, flexibility, and worker health. Moreover, the findings showed that all participants had stated that the EDB had shown its commitment to promoting SHRM by providing technical training and soft skills training to most engineers, regardless of gender. Unfortunately, none of the engineers reported receiving any environmental training or training focused on green competency and social awareness training.

This study also found that the GM and manager's method for compensation and reward practices is not well communicated with employees or engineers. Moreover, there were no incentives, whether monetary or non-monetary, for employees who demonstrated environmentally conscious behaviour. Consequently, the company's compensation and reward

policies were developed in a manner that may potentially put female engineers at a disadvantage, due to the ongoing existence of the gender pay gap in New Zealand. Furthermore, the compensation policies were not aligned with the company's sustainability strategy.

This study also contributes to knowledge by providing an innovative perspective on the relationship between SHRM practices and gender equality, highlighting the robust connection between these two elements that might be unfamiliar to some individuals. This study expands our understanding of the fact that some SHRM practices in the EDB are not in line with the characteristics of SHRM practices outlined by Mariappanadar (2020). These practices include technical and non-technical skills training, empowered decision-making, and company's compensation and reward systems. The findings of this study are also valuable to managers, experienced professionals, and newcomers to the engineering industry or EDB in New Zealand.

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Chapter One Introduction

Sustainable human resource management (SHRM) practices played a crucial role in addressing global sustainable development challenges, particularly in promoting gender equality and ensuring the long-term viability of a business. This had garnered significant scholarly interest. Work-family balance and workplace flexibility were SHRM practices that promoted gender equality (Chung & van der Lippe, 2020; Connell, 2005; Fudge, 2011; Peters & Blomme, 2019). Gender equality was a significant sustainability concern and was specifically addressed in objective 5 of the United Nations' sustainable development goals (UN, 2023). Nevertheless, there was a scarcity of research regarding the role of SHRM practices in achieving gender equality within the engineering industry, particularly in the electricity distribution business (EDB) in New Zealand.

IEA (2023) acknowledged the crucial role of electricity in New Zealand in promoting sustainability and proposed the electrification strategy as a model for carbon-free power generation. In the meantime, male dominance especially in the engineering field and in this case in particular electrical and power engineering was universally agreed. Likewise, the fact that the number of male engineers was much higher than that of female engineers proved to be a major challenge toward achieving gender equality in engineering. Indeed, the issue of the lack of female engineers in the engineering industry in New Zealand must be addressed with various actions (Fox et al., 2020).

This study set out to assess the application of SHRM practices embraced by the EDB in North Island, New Zealand, and whether they were in accordance with the characteristics of SHRM practices set out by Mariappanadar (2020). In addition, this study also attempted to assess the awareness of the engineers about the existence of SHRM practices within the company and investigated the impact of implementing these SHRM practices in promoting gender equality.

As a diversity goal, it was set that EDB's new recruits would have a gender balance of 50:50 by the end of Q1 2024, if applicable.

The purpose of this EDB was to enhance the ability of EDB to withstand and recover from challenges, and to ensure its continued sustainability in the electricity distribution market over the long term. This paper will elucidate the SHRM practices that have been implemented by EDB and analyze the impact of these SHRM practices on gender equality. This study would emphasize the strong relationship between SHRM and gender equality. This research would also assess the successful implementation of SHRM practices by EDB, as well as identify any practices that have been ineffective.

1.1 Motivation for the Research Topic

The scarcity of research conducted in the New Zealand setting, regardless of the significant role SHRM, gender equality and sustainable development goal-5 (SDG-5) played in engineering companies; the author's prior educational and professional background; past and current instances of gender disparity in the field of engineering, such as more than 40% of women with advanced skills in engineering are prone to exiting the business, while the women who chose to stay only makeup 16% of the business's total personnel (Coyle, 2022), all contributed to the decision to conduct this investigation.

SHRM is essential for an engineering company's success, and academics placed great importance on it. SHRM offered several advantages for achieving long-lasting organisational performance, maintaining a competitive edge, tackling ecological and social issues, and promoting inclusiveness, diversity, and the happiness of staff members (Wijayawardena, 2022). Nevertheless, while examining the existing published research, it was discovered that there was a scarcity of studies on the relationships of SHRM, gender equality, and SDG-5 in engineering

companies in New Zealand. Hence, this research specifically examined SHRM in New Zealand with the aim of investigating their strategies for achieving gender equality in New Zealand's engineering industry (EDB).

Furthermore, this research had been prompted by some concerns arising from the lack of green or environmentally friendly competencies within the workforce (Lombardi, 2024), marginalization of women in predominately male knowledge-based sectors and vocations such as STEM fields, IT, and science (Cain & Leahey, 2014), the EDB's challenging goals which were ESG (environmental, social, and governance) goals of achieving a 50/50 gender split among new hires by the end of quarter 1 2024, the absence of prominent female inspirational figures (womenintech.uk, 2023), and a persistent shortage of engineering talents in New Zealand (ENZ, 2023). Therefore, it was necessary to conduct a study on this subject.

Furthermore, the researcher's previous postgraduate degree in HRM and her prior job experience as a civil servant or auditor in a local government in Indonesia further stimulated her curiosity about the issue of gender equality in the workplace and the application of SHRM practices within the industry or private sector. As a result, the present study was undertaken.

1.2 Research Background

Sustainability is important to 87% of New Zealanders (Silk, 2019). In addition, New Zealand was committed to gradually eliminating the use of petroleum, gas, and coal and transitioning to a power infrastructure that relied entirely on renewable sources of energy and became ever more dependent on electricity to fulfil its carbon reduction goals (IEA, 2023). Therefore, the role of electrical engineers was very important and crucial in providing innovation in the design, manufacture, development, and implementation of electrical systems, renewable

energy and electric vehicle that support zero carbon emissions and sustainability, as well as providing knowledge about these matters to the public.

On the other hand, corporations frequently exhibited less inclusivity towards females compared to males as a result of the engineering sector's consistent male dominance, aspects such as maternity policy, flexible childcare help, and unsupportive organisational climate might potentially influence a woman's decision to depart from her current employment (womenintech.uk, 2023).

Moreover, sustainable practices were being used by corporations to stand out and obtained a competitive edge (Høgevoid & Svensson, 2012; McWilliams & Siegel, 2011; Vitolla et al., 2017). Promoting sustainability can provide organizations with a competitive edge, resulting in increased profitability, market opportunities, and enduring shareholder value (European Commission cited in Gutiérrez-Martínez and Duhamel (2019)). However, SHRM for the common good (Aust et al., 2020) was relatively underrepresented in HRM research, in which conventional HRM mostly viewed humans as resources to be used for organizational profitability (Bal, 2020; Bal & Dóci, 2018; Janssens & Steyaert, 2009). Meanwhile, most companies operated under a globalized capitalism framework where profit is the fundamental driver (Munger & Villarreal-Diaz, 2019). Therefore, conducting research on the gender disparity in the Engineering industry in New Zealand was imperative in order to identify the strategies, measures, and optimal SHRM practices required to address and resolve this gender gap issue.

1.3 Research Significance, Purpose, and Questions

In order to understand the impact of SHRM practices on gender equality, especially concerning the female engineers of an EDB in New Zealand, this research sought to fill the gap in the literature on SHRM in New Zealand, especially regarding the issue of gender equality and SHRM practices in corporate management, and how these practices affected gender equality issues in the country.

Moreover, this research highlighted the effects SHRM practices had on advancing gender equality within the engineering employment sphere with special reference to one of the EDBs operating in the North Island of New Zealand. This study provided a unique viewpoint and proved the practices of SHRM to be interrelated with the advancement of gender equality – and that very few people recognized that these two aspects were tightly intertwined.

Indeed, this study also offered useful perspectives and insights for both female and male engineers in New Zealand. In addition, valuable information on the importance of SHRM, gender equality and a more sustainable work environment could be provided by this research for the managers and leader of the EDB. It also identified the gaps in the current implementation of SHRM and provided suggestions based on the findings.

The significance of these findings for EDB and the engineering sector in New Zealand lied in the inclusion of both female and male engineers as participants in this research. In addition, these findings could be highly valuable for managers, including both experienced professionals and newcomers to the engineering industry or EDB in New Zealand. Furthermore, the government could benefit from these results as they provided insights into the specific areas that require attention when implementing SHRM practices. In order to promote the attainment of gender equality, active cooperation from multiple stakeholders is necessary.

This study would provide insights into achieving gender equality within the company through the utilisation of SHRM strategies, and the factors that influenced the underrepresentation of

women in engineering or the shortage of female leaders, and the possible challenges in the implementation of SHRM practices in New Zealand's engineering industry.

This chapter commenced with clarifying the rationales behind undertaking this investigation, subsequently offering an introduction to the research subject, and concluding with a synopsis of the major objective and importance of this research. The final part outlined the overall structure of this thesis. The subsequent section would provide an introduction to the reasons behind conducting the research.

Thus, the objective of this study was to present a response to the subsequent key research question: What is the role of sustainable human resource management practices in achieving gender equality?

1.4 Thesis Structure

The thesis was structured over six chapters. Chapter One provided an overview of the reasons and importance for this investigation, included fundamental information on SHRM practices and gender equality, and described the framework of this thesis. Chapter Two comprised a comprehensive literature review that examined the current research on the significance of SHRM practices and its impact on gender equality in the engineering industry in New Zealand specifically EDB. It delved into the definition of SHRM practices, SHRM practices, and gender equality in New Zealand, the glass ceiling effect, and the relationship between gender equality and SHRM.

Chapter Three explored the study methods employed in this investigation. The text commenced by providing a comprehensive explanation of the researcher's philosophical standpoint, qualitative research approach, and study framework. It then proceeded to elaborate on the data-gathering methodology, thematic analysis approach, and concerns regarding ethics. Chapter

Four included the findings from semi-structured interviews conducted with eight electrical engineers in New Zealand, consisting of three female engineers and five male engineers. The interviews covered two key areas: the significance of SHRM practices and the impact of SHRM practices on gender equality. Chapter Five provided an analysis of the practical findings within the framework of the current body of research. Chapter Six served as the final chapter, providing the end of the text. This research offered a succinct summary of its findings, contributions, and limitations, along with recommendations for future research.

Chapter Two Literature Review

This chapter critically examined the existing body of literature on sustainable human resource management (SHRM) and gender equality in the engineering industry in order to identify any gaps in previous studies and propose relevant research questions. To initiate this process, it commenced by scrutinizing the significance of SHRM in the engineering industry and establishing the precise definition of SHRM and gender equality employed in this investigation. This study also examined various viewpoints of the theories of SHRM theories. Finally, this study examined the concept of the glass ceiling effect and investigated the relationship between gender equality and SHRM.

2.1 Definition of Sustainable HRM

According to Mariappanadar (2020), sustainable HRM (SHRM) aimed to offer a sustainability-focused perspective on HRM processes, procedures, and practices in order to integrate and attain the conflicting and incongruous monetary, ecological, and human/social wellness goals of company tactics.

Another definition from De Prins et al. (2014) and Kramar (2014) outlined how SHRM was developed that such a system was enacted to achieve advantageous outcome across the facets of Triple Bottom Line and as at the time emerged SHRM appreciated the notions of these 3 types of umbrella resources as being linked and complemented each other.

Another definition, SHRM is the application of tactics and procedures that allow for the accomplishment of financial, societal, and environmental objectives, with a consequence both within and beyond the organisation, and for a prolonged period of time, while mitigating negative consequences and cycles of feedback (Anlesinya & Susomrith, 2020; Ehnert et al., 2021). Thus, SHRM can be defined as a technique of managing employees that aims to not

only enhance company performance and profits, but also promote human well-being, preserve the natural environment, and meet financial objectives.

2.2 SHRM Practices and Gender Equality in New Zealand

This section will analyze the significance of SHRM practices and gender equality in New Zealand and explore the fundamental theory of SHRM.

2.2.1 The Role of SHRM Practices in New Zealand

For a large majority of the people in New Zealand, the issue of sustainability is very important, and as such 87 percent of the people in the country are concerned about it (Silk, 2019). This makes sense as the popularity growth of the term ‘sustainability’ within organization is mainly to leverage it to stand out amongst competitors (Høgevoid & Svensson, 2012; McWilliams & Siegel, 2011; Vitolla et al., 2017) The expression of commitment to sustainability holds benefits for organizations, which include the attainment of competitive advantage through ‘increased profitability and expansion, access to untapped surfaces in the market, and long-lasting value for shareholders’ (European Commission cited in Gutiérrez-Martínez and Duhamel (2019)). HRM that was sustainable and gender equality were interrelated ideas that contributed to a more equitable and fairer workplace. Indeed, gender equality was crucial since it ensured that all employees, irrespective of their gender, had equitable access to resources as well as opportunities.

Furthermore, Podgorodnichenko et al. (2022) pointed out six following concepts regarding SHRM. Firstly, organisations that had adopted an incorporated strategy for SHRM were shown to benefit in a variety of ways by this research, suggesting that a more comprehensive strategy to incorporation might provide similar results. Secondly, SHRM which was socially and

environmentally responsible was becoming increasingly popular as a means for businesses to comply with the principles of sustainable growth, which prioritised meeting the requirements of the present without negatively impacting the capability of next generations to continue doing the same. Thirdly, according to the results of this research, HR managers' responsibilities might be expanded by incorporating sustainability goals into HRM, which in turn could assist managers see their own staff as a key HRM stakeholder.

Fourthly, although it was hoped that HRM would be encouraged to re-approve the viewpoint of stakeholders and multiracial framework of view with the capability to develop common principles for numerous stakeholders as a result of its incorporation with an organisational sustainability plan of action, such a plan had not yet been carried out consistently or systematically. Fifthly, while results of this research recommended HR managers appreciated their staff's multifaceted contributions and the diversity of their perspectives, further research was needed to determine whether and how employees perceived this shift, and how they positioned themselves as an integral part of their organisations on the basis of a sustainability goals. Sixthly, HRM's present concentration on shareholder profit must be diluted by sustainability's comprehensive strategy and required attention on the requirements of a varied set of stakeholders, ensuring all stakeholders, involving employees, more relevant. This study's empirical evidence supported this claim by showing that a company's sustainability strategy aids in making sure HRM viewed workers as an important stakeholder. Moreover, according to the research by Paauwe and Boselie (2005), there might be wide discrepancies in how various stakeholders perceived the goals of HRM procedures and approaches.

Among the aforementioned six points, the ones that held the greatest relevance to this research endeavour were points 2, 3, 5, and 6 as following: socially and ecologically responsible HRM was growing in popularity as a solution for firms to address existing demands without jeopardizing future possibilities. Sustainability goals in HRM might expand HR managers'

obligations and help them see their employees as stakeholders. Additional research is needed to discover how workers perceived this transition and how they positioned themselves as vital to their companies' sustainability goals. Sustainability's holistic approach and focus on different stakeholders must dilute HRM's shareholder profit focus and elevate all stakeholders, including employees.

2.2.2 Gender Equality in New Zealand

During her first UN General Assembly speech on September 28, 2018, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern reaffirmed New Zealand's dedication to long-term sustainability and gender equality (Ardern, 2018). New Zealand had been a champion for women, children, and the eradication of prejudice and assault since the UN foundation, and its current position on the equality of women and men, as assessed by worldwide indicators, appeared commendable (Parker & Donnelly, 2021).

Based on the most recent Global Gender Gap Report by the World Economic Forum (WEF), New Zealand was ranked sixth globally in terms of female financial involvement, involvement in politics, well-being, and literacy, and the nation had successfully reduced its total gender disparity by 79.9% (WEF, 2020). However, in the engineering sector, there were only 694 (16%) female engineers in New Zealand in 2015, compared to 3,684 (84%) male engineers (IPENZ, 2015). Moreover, Wellington had only 21 female electrical engineers in 2018, compared to 390 male electrical engineers; among the 1,341 male electrical engineers working in Auckland, only 105 were women; only 27 women worked as electrical engineers in Canterbury, compared to 546 men; and only three women were working as electrical engineers in Otago, compared to the 123 men (StatsNZ, 2018). Although there had been a rise in the demand for female engineers in New Zealand, and the field was increasingly seen as integral

to meeting the Sustainable Development Goals, many engineering firms particularly those involved in power distribution, continued to have trouble attracting qualified female candidates. Women played a crucial role in New Zealand economics. Although women represented a major contributor to the country's economy, they continued to encounter challenges pertaining to gender equality. Hence, the prime minister underscored the importance of gender inclusion as a key area of attention for the administration.

Moreover, Fox et al. (2020) pointed out four following issues regarding gender equality in New Zealand. Firstly, to increase the number of women in engineering domains in New Zealand, it was crucial to implement efforts that provided systematic assistance to foster, safeguard, and motivate girls to look for professions in these historically male-dominated areas. Secondly, fathers, families, and teachers had to improve their knowledge and become much more careful, respectful, and inspiring, and strive to change the matrilineal students' culture into better engineering graduates. Thirdly, for this reason, therefore, it was very important that the carers and educators were completely knowledgeable and identified about engineering and how it would be used to improve the prosperity of people and communities. Lastly, although teachers had some influence over the career choices of learners, it was parents who had more influence. Thus, parental support and advice also proved to be beneficial as female students made decisions about their choice of an engineering study program. Moreover, parents were found to impact female students' selection of engineering degrees more than their teachers did.

Also, in this regard, two subsections were available to address issues pertaining to gender equity. The concept of gender as a structure was extended to the cultural and economic factors, which enabled fair asset distribution as well as equal access to assets and opportunities for both gender groups (Bapuji et al., 2020; Emrich et al., 2004; Permanyer, 2013; Stotsky et al., 2016). This area turned out to be of substantial importance to scientists that caused very complex investigations to be conducted upon it.

2.2.3 Types of Sustainable HRM

Green HRM

For the purpose of examining sustainable HRM (SHRM), it was necessary to understand fundamentally the different categories of SHRM. Jackson and Seo (2010) discuss SHRM's Type 1 mentioning Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) and denoting it as a set of activities that organizations use aiming to the creation of the strategies for development of an ecologically sustainable society. Further, concerning Kramar (2014), several views on Green HRM were related to the HRM practices aimed at the success of green initiatives. In this line, organizations that internalized SHRM practices would outperform organizations that chose not to adopt the practices.

Socially Responsible HRM

At the same time, however, Dupont et al. (2013) recommended a complete rethinking of the conception of risk. Social signals of SHRM – the second type: Responsible HRM, which also bore the name of Social Responsibility in HRM, was credited to a concept focused on formal conduct, policies, and practices embraced towards the improvement of employees' health and the general quality of work and life (Dupont et al., 2013). The definition of the term SR-HRM included strategies and practices that were consistent with the concepts of social responsibility of business, such as justice, equity, transparency, liberty, etc (Dupont et al., 2013). Additionally, the prior studies noted that the successful application of SR-HRM was linked with improvements in individual worker-related strategies and behaviors, such as happiness in the workplace and commitment to the company, which in turn could contribute to improvements in the wider organization (Dupont et al., 2013). This was confirmed by several studies carried out by Albrecht et al. (2015), Barrick et al. (2015) and Shen and Benson (2016). Nevertheless,

it was important to note that SR-HRM was not just focused on generating organizational value, but also on generating value for individuals and society as a whole (Paauwe, 2017). Hence, the employees of a company were considered a company's most valuable asset, and it was crucial to enhance their competence. Additionally, it was essential to consider their needs and well-being in order to ensure optimal performance and the long-term sustainability of the company.

Triple Bottom Line HRM

On the other hand, Lopez-Cabrales and Valle-Cabrera (2020) argued that the alignment of performance assessment systems and remuneration should be focused on acknowledging and incentivizing achievements and effectiveness in the implementation and advancement of strategies that promoted type 3 of SHRM, namely the Triple Bottom Line HRM encompassed the financial, social, and ecological dimensions. Lopez-Cabrales and Valle-Cabrera (2020) pointed out that companies should implement the kinds of investments which were aimed at securing the organization's position as an advocate for sustainability. This might be seen as a work arrangement that prioritized creativity, proactive measures, mitigation, and a forward-looking approach, which could be referred to as Over-Sustainability, and as a result, workers were likely to view this as a motivating factor that strengthened their dedication and engagement with sustainability (Lopez-Cabrales and Valle-Cabrera (2020)). This work arrangement aligned with a progressive SHRM approach, aimed to attain the triple bottom line of sustainability including financial, social, and ecological aspects (Guerci & Pedrini, 2014; Martínez-del-Río et al., 2012). Thus, in addition to their primary objective of generating substantial profits, firms were obligated to demonstrate concern for the community by implementing initiatives aimed at enhancing the capabilities and well-being of the local populace. Furthermore, it was imperative for companies to actively engage in the preservation, reduction, and resolution of adverse effects on the environment.

Common Good HRM

Type 4 of SHRM, known as Common Good HRM was argued by Aust et al. (2020) as a novel approach to SHRM, which might be crucial to moving forward in the field's pursuit of tackling Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Common good HRM signified a significant paradigm shift in the comprehension of company objectives and the role played by HRM (Aust et al., 2020). The concept of the common good entailed the provision of assistance to corporate leaders and workers in their efforts to contribute to global ecological and social advancement (Aust et al., 2020). The concept of the common good referred to the collective well-being and benefit of society as a whole, and it encompassed the idea that HRM placed significant emphasis on its potential to assist in the achievement of the United Nations SDGs (Aust et al., 2020). Indeed, Common Good HRM prioritised the greatest needs of the collective, placed them on par with, or maybe even above, the individual aspirations, necessities, and aspirations of both employees and the organization as a whole (Daly et al., 1994; Frémeaux & Michelson, 2017). Therefore, SHRM techniques, specifically common good HRM purpose, had to be examined to achieve gender equality in engineering.

However, the existing body of literature on SHRM for the common good (Aust et al., 2020) stayed relatively limited and marginalized compared to the larger corpus of HRM research, which predominantly adhered to the instrumentalist framework of viewing humans as resources to be utilized for organizational profitability (Bal, 2020; Bal & Dóci, 2018; Janssens & Steyaert, 2009). Similarly, organizations persisted in functioning within a globalized capitalist framework, wherein the pursuit of profit remained the primary guiding principle that only a limited number of organizations might really and durably deviate from (Munger & Villarreal-Diaz, 2019). Furthermore, although democratic working conditions had been advocated by researchers as a solution for enhancing worth and sustainability (Bal, 2017; Rhodes, 2016), there was a lack of comprehensive explanations regarding the mechanisms that explained how

organizations could successfully transition into attainable democratic systems (Bal & Brookes, 2022).

2.2.4 Characteristics of SHRM

The eleven traits of SHRM, as explained by Mariappanadar (2020) were as follows. Firstly, in HRM, "sustainable practices" referred to the set of policies and procedures designed to encourage the kind of actions and mindsets that would lead to better-integrated company sustainability results. Secondly, unlike commitment-based HRM procedures, which primarily aimed to benefit the organization, SHRM procedures also took into account human-social, financial, and ecological considerations. Thirdly, using hiring and training methods to cultivate employees' competencies with extra societal awareness traits, SHRM approaches sought to harmonize the needs of all parties involved, organizations, and workers. Fourthly, HRM strategies that endured include giving employees more say in company matters, encouraging communication across departments and levels of the company, and coordinating administrative tasks with strategic initiatives. Fifthly, the needs of the organization, its workers, and its stakeholders might be better aligned through training and hiring practices that prioritized social awareness (Pandey and Gupta as cited in Mariappanadar (2020)). This would lead to better economic outcomes for the organization while also promoting awareness of social issues. Sixthly, achieving the demands of important stakeholders and improving organizational profitability while being socially responsible might be achieved through remuneration and reward strategies that were both intrinsic and extrinsic, as well as altruistic. Seventhly, an organization, its workers, and the environment in which the organization operated might all reap the benefits of organizational structure policies that promoted sustainability via empowered decision-making. Eighthly, the elements of a work-life balance that were seen at the organizational level included small societal damage to employment. Ninthly, Wellness in the

workplace and among employees was the goal of a long-term business support initiative. Tenthly, in order to help EMS kept ecosystems healthy by lowering their environmental impact, it was important to use green competency-driven personnel selection and training procedures that were environmentally focused in nature. Eleventhly, the goal of a SHRM approach that exhibited the synthesis impact is to equip workers with the knowledge and skills they needed to take informed decisions that contributed to the overall sustainability of their company.

Furthermore, Stankevičiute and Savanevičiene (2018) pointed out the key attributes or characteristics of SHRM, which included the perspective of the future, employee well-being, environmental stewardship, financial viability, employee engagement and communication, employee growth and advancement, third-party collaborations, adaptability, adherence to ethical standards above legal requirements, employee collaboration, objectiveness, and equal treatment.

Therefore, the concept of sustainability in corporate management was gaining significant attention from various research endeavors. The human resources of an organization were a vital asset and a key source of competitive advantage for a firm. In addition, gender equality was a significant sustainability concern and was specifically addressed in objective 5 of the United Nations' sustainable development goals (UN, 2023). Nevertheless, there was a scarcity of research on SHRM in the corporate management setting in New Zealand, particularly in terms of the relationship between SHRM practices and gender equality in the country.

2.2.5 Theories of SHRM

In the last two decades, there had been an unprecedented growth in SHRM concisely where most scholars influenced included scholars of management and sustainability. This shift had led to a moving away from the restriction of only concentrating on strategic HRM and its

outcomes. Whereas the strategic HRM expressed a growing concern for attaining non-financial goals, SHRM signified an emerging shift by determining and implementing HRM practices that reached societal and ecological concern as well as financial concerns (Singh & Vanka, 2020). Under this approach, a lot of stakeholders and the ecosystem were also included in SHRM (Singh & Vanka, 2020). However, its key strength was a balance in the needs of managers, employees, and society for the purposes of fostering development which was referred to as the triple bottom line approach. Three such approaches that were most fundamental to the subsequent development of SHRM were identified (Singh & Vanka, 2020). These frameworks included the appreciation of negative externality and pollution to the stakeholders (Mariappanadar, 2012, 2013, 2014) Respect Opening Continuity ROC model (De Prins et al., 2014), and the stakeholder theory (Guerci & Pedrini, 2014; Guerci et al., 2014).

First Theory: The Notion of Negative Externalities and Damages to Stakeholders

The synthesis paradox method which was proposed by Mariappanadar (2014) sought to improve organizational earnings while limiting the harm imposed on the stakeholders using HRM processes and practices. This was achieved with a mutually enhancing approach rather than employing a unique one.

Second Theory: The Respect Openness Continuity (ROC) Approach

The Respect Openness Continuity (ROC) approach, suggested by De Prins et al. (2014), was a SHRM model that stressed the need to treat employees with respect if the organization aims to exist and succeed for a long time. The operating characteristics (ROC) as turnover labor intensity emphasized the necessity of human resources for competitiveness (De Prins et al., 2014). The model asserted that appreciation of employees aimed at community benefits in that the organization acquired shared benefits and also had a positive impact on the community by doing initiatives that enhance communication, autonomy, career advancement, employment opportunities, and quality of life amongst its employees (De Prins et al., 2014). Ensuring

equality of opportunity for women and men to hold positions of authority and influence in the workplace would help further the cause of promoting gender equality in New Zealand. Further, in their study, De Prins et al. (2020) found that personnel harm decreased with the implementation of HRM procedures. Thus, SHRM theories have substantially focused on interconnections between the organization, its employees, and the environment (Singh & Vanka, 2020).

Moreover, De Prins et al. (2014) demonstrated an ROC paradigm, Respect, Openness, and Continuity, in which illustrative procedures of SHRM were encapsulated – providing formal measures to guarantee every worker’s fair chance, combating bias, and engaging in remedial actions that would be conducive to increased organizational diversity and improved inclusiveness of the society. Thus, the ROC approach was the theory which was pertinent to this study.

The Third Theory: The Stakeholder View

This theory was proposed by Guerci and Pedrini (2014) who illustrated SHRM procedures, namely by offering breaks and support for the care of children and senior citizens went over the scope of legitimate obligations. The effect was enhanced involvement of staff members. This was done in response to demands that HRM better integrated stakeholder and environmental considerations and promoted a more inclusive workforce by actively seeking out diverse candidates (Guerci et al., 2014).

The latest study had demonstrated the substantial impact of SHRM. In their study, Diaz-Carrion et al. (2018) examined the significance of sustainable procedures in HRM in augmenting worker happiness and dedication, while also strengthening the organization's reputation within the community. SHRM primarily aimed to minimize adverse effects on all parties involved (Singh & Vanka, 2020). However, it also emphasized its connection to organizational success, which was a crucial element of a company (de Bussy & Suprawan, 2012). SHRM facilitated

the concurrent attainment of organizational achievement objectives (Bučiuniene & Kazlauskaitė, 2012), enhancement of staff enthusiasm as well as work-life balance (Newman et al., 2016; Shen & Benson, 2016), and adoption of a comprehensive strategy in regard to workers' families and the community (Cleveland et al., 2015; Diaz-Carrion et al., 2018; Mariappanadar, 2014). The existing body of study in the field of SHRM indicated that by adopting a sustainable approach, various roles in HRM such as acquiring skilled workers, remuneration, training, a variety of backgrounds, job advancement, and safety and wellness at work could be realigned to yield mutually beneficial outcomes for both the organization and its staff members (Diaz-Carrion et al., 2018; Shen & Benson, 2016). Moreover, professional development was a crucial aspect of HRM and by aligning current HRM procedures with SHRM principles, organizations could facilitate the long-term growth of professions (Singh & Vanka, 2020).

2.3 Glass Ceiling Effect

The concept of the glass ceiling effect referred to the phenomenon wherein women faced limited representation in positions with greater power within hierarchical structures, as well as in higher-paying positions (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions cited in Amalia and Amira (2016)). The glass ceiling idea referred to the existence of a perceptual and prejudiced wall that impeded women from advancing within the organizational hierarchy, hence limiting their ability to transition between positions (Amalia & Amira, 2016). Moreover, the comprehensive examination of extant literature revealed that several variables, including personal characteristics, familial dynamics, social and cultural influences, and organizational elements, contributed to the development and perpetuation of stereotypical beliefs among individuals, as a result, these factors impeded the advancement of women in workplaces, hence hindering their professional advancement within organizations or establishing “glass ceiling” (Tabassum & Nayak, 2021; Taparia & Lenka, 2022).

The research showed that female employees faced obstacles to job progression, and strategic HRM—the predominant HRM approach—had failed to build long-term employment opportunities for female employees (Singh & Vanka, 2020). Women's job choices and trends were heavily influenced by the "second in line" of activities that were not related to work such as caring for children and senior citizens, domestic duties, married life, shifting locations, and other private life engagements (Hochschild & Machung, 1989). Each woman had private problems but their impact on job accomplishments and the professional path was significant, thus many accomplished women opted to end their careers owing to exhaustion (Fondas, 1996). Insufficient organizational assistance could cause voluntary drops from employment, resulting in a "leaky pipeline" and bright women might seek professional pauses or shift careers due to poor assistance from their employers, despite job and unpaid duties (Cabrera, 2007; Singh & Vanka, 2020; Sullivan, 1999). Disruptions in careers were associated with unfavorable consequences such as wage reduction, incentives, and progress (Eby, 2001; Singh & Vanka, 2020; Valcour & Tolbert, 2003). Impacts from interruptions could have long-term detrimental effects on job results, sometimes lasting up to 25 years (Reitman & Schneer, 2005). Work pauses might decrease "know-how, know who, and know why" abilities, which were essential for successful achievement in the knowledge-based business (Defillippi & Arthur, 1994; Singh & Vanka, 2020). This circumstance developed into particularly challenging occupations such as management, in which abilities and knowledge were regarded as rare and served as a crucial driver of competitive edge and novelty for an organization (O'Reilly & Pfeffer, 2000).

Furthermore, according to Participant 4, as documented in the study conducted by Amalia and Amira (2016), it was observed that women appeared to exhibit greater concern in things pertaining to family. Male engineers often relied on their wives for assistance in taking responsibility for their children, but women engineers were typically responsible for both childcare and their professional careers (Amalia & Amira, 2016). Moreover, according to

Kolade and Kehinde (2013), the assumption that women were inherently biologically incapable of doing tasks traditionally associated with males had resulted in inadvertent discrimination against them in terms of their participation in the engineering field.

However, recent research conducted by Krivkovich et al. (2022) in McKinsey & Company, revealed that the impediment preventing women from advancing in the workplace was not just attributable to the concept of the "glass ceiling". Krivkovich et al. (2022) pointed out four following issues. First, women in the early stages of their professional journeys were disproportionately affected by a phenomenon known as the "broken rung", this referred to the significant disparity between men and women in terms of promotion rates from starting positions. Second, according to the survey, the number of women who obtained advancement to management positions from low-level occupations was 87 for every 100 male employees who earned a comparable promotion, while for every hundred males who were promoted, only 82 women of color were able to achieve the same level of advancement. Third, the shortage of upward mobility could not be attributed to an absence of desire and determination, as indicated by a poll of 27,000 workers, which revealed that women had similar aspirations for professional advancement as their male counterparts. However, it was possible that prejudice might influence the decision-making process, as company managers tend to prioritize the future prospects of newly hired male staff members, whereas young women were evaluated based on their past performance (Krivkovich et al. (2022)). Fourth, the impact of the pandemic on the preferences of women towards their employers included an increased emphasis on factors such as opportunities for growth, flexible work arrangements, the welfare of employees, and the promotion of heterogeneity, equality, and inclusiveness within organizations.

Moreover, according to Arulampalam et al. (2007) and Xiu and Gunderson (2014) "glass ceiling" hindered female's job promotion. According to Smith et al. (2012), bias and glass ceiling beliefs could impact personal work parameters including job fulfillment, involvement

at work, contentment, and wellness. According to Dubbelt et al. (2016), a significant number of women who encountered or deemed prejudice, intolerance, and preconceptions tend to encounter delayed advancements in their careers. Prejudice and hurdles could result in lower salaries, financial incentives, and advancements which would adversely affect professional performance, which was heavily influenced by financial rewards (Singh & Vanka, 2020). Women's professional results were significantly impacted by salary and advancement imbalance, with adverse consequences for organizations such as poor involvement in the workplace and wellness led to poor organizational dedication, a high rate of resignations, and predicted job performance (Wright & Cropanzano, 2000).

Research suggested that salary and advancement gaps negatively affect organizational diversity management, leading to improved executive choices and creativity (McLeod et al., 1996; Shen et al., 2009). Hence, the disparity in compensation and advancement had a notably detrimental effect on women and may also have unfavourable consequences for the organization.

2.4 Relationship between Gender Equality and SHRM

After reviewing the findings of a Danish study, Nielsen (2020) concluded that the following four conditions were necessary to achieve gender parity in the workplace: (a) all recruitment and selection actions had to be apparent with continual supervision; (b) exploiting gaps towards fast, inexpensive, and seamless recruitment and selection had to be prevented by choosing devoted managers and a gender-equality team panel; and (c) assignments needed to be made solely on the basis of excellence; (d) recruiters who did not adhere to transparent processes had to be charged accountable; and (e) it was important to market open positions extensively, both locally and nationally, as well as worldwide.

Lu et al. (2023) stated that the results showed that SHRM practices had a beneficial effect on staff resiliency and resulted in a highly engaged workforce. He explained that workplace involvement was another indirect pathway via which staff resiliency influenced performance. Moreover, it was not enough for the CEO to just aim for a 50/50 gender split, and the rewards and practices of businesses should be significantly altered to help women succeed in the office (Team, 2022). Further, according to (Silbey, 2016), many women who studied engineering have second thoughts about pursuing the field because of gender stereotypes, lack of demanding jobs, sexual assault, and lack of access to a strong network of peers.

Moreover, Waizmann et al. (2020) explained that even among academically gifted female students, the perception that engineering was a male-dominated career persists. Women's representation had grown in the fields of mathematics, biology, and physics, but continued to be stagnant in engineering (Waizmann et al. (2020). Furthermore, Sharma et al. (2022) pointed out that employers needed to value employees' adaptability, health, involvement, and competence, and provided them additional chances to develop their abilities for employment. In order to improve employees' logical and decision-making abilities, it was necessary to cultivate their foundational knowledge, technical expertise, and character traits, and the new attitude and perceptive growth could be aided by SHRM practices (Sharma et al. (2022).

Moreover, academic interest in the connection between HRM and CSR/CS had grown steadily over the past 15 years (Ehnert et al. (2021) as cited in (De Stefano et al., 2017)). According to this view, human resources conspired with managers to disregard the interests of other stakeholders (Beer, Boselie, & Brewster, 2015 as cited in (De Stefano et al., 2017)). While more and more studies in the field of stakeholder theory had highlighted the significance of employees as both supporters and beneficiaries of individual and organizational (De Stefano et al., 2017).

HRM and sustainability were intrinsically linked due to their shared philosophical and applied underpinnings in terms of principles, objectives, and standards of conduct (Schoemaker et al., 2006) and how human resources (HR) might help steer a company's principles, theory, and behavior on sustainability (Lam & Khare, 2010). Employees' primary stakeholder responsibility and the role of HR inside sustainability were both comparatively unexplored due to the lack of clarity among the domains of HR and CSR roles in organizations (De Stefano et al., 2017).

Guerci et al. (2014) argued that future studies of HR's part in CSR and sustainability had to put significant work into creating a multistakeholder viewpoint in HR. The HR department's actions should centre on shifting their attention outward in order to meet the needs of both internal and external stakeholders (Guerci et al. (2014). App et al. (2012) pointed out that by incorporating SHRM practices into the value proposition for staff members, businesses should be able to recruit and retain top talent since they would have created a distinct and appealing company image. In an economy driven by knowledge, highly trained and competent workers were in great need because they might provide a company with a competitive advantage over its rivals over the long term (see, for example, (Moroko & Uncles, 2008)).

Podgorodnichenko et al. (2020) pointed out that HRM, like every other organizational role, had to be capable of adapting its methods, strategies, and procedures to the ever-evolving demands of the marketplace. Therefore, centered on the SLR, they saw three critical domains that required focus: recognizing significant functions that HRM may perform in the growth of accountable and sustainable organizations; contemplation on obstacles connected with the HRM involvement with CSR/S; and identification of successful modern HRM methods that emphasized an organised advancement of sustainability as their main objective (Podgorodnichenko et al. (2020). HRM, like every other organizational role, had to be capable

of adapting its methods, strategies, and procedures to the ever-evolving demands of the marketplace (Podgorodnichenko et al. (2020).

Baum et al. (2016) explained that integrating human rights concepts into human resource practices was essential in all nation-level settings if we were to attain sustainability objectives. Further, Parker et al. (2022) stated that to better understand the depth and breadth of the movement toward equality in New Zealand's public service, a qualitative research strategy was undertaken. This method took into account not only the participants but also the researchers' interpretation of the evidence to provide a fuller picture of a phenomenon in its social and cultural setting (Myers, 2020).

Therefore, there was a lack of empirical study on the importance of SHRM in the electricity distribution business in promoting gender equality, especially from the views of employees or subordinates. It was recommended that future research in the field of SHRM utilized a more diverse and representative sample, encompassing not just managers but also employees and other pertinent stakeholders (Anlesinya & Susomrith, 2020; Macke & Genari, 2019). Indeed, more research should be conducted to determine the effects of SHRM practices on employees' emotional and social well-being as well as their level of dedication to the organization (Macke & Genari, 2019). Given that happy and dedicated workers were more likely to push for increased profits and productivity, and if the economy was doing well, it made sense to put money into improving social and environmental conditions, as well as the long-term sustainability of the cooperative (Macke & Genari, 2019).

Bratton et al. (2023) pointed out three following issues regarding the research gap in sustainability. Firstly, knowing how SHRM contributed to the adoption and implementation of SDGs was crucial for achieving long-term success in business, thus further research utilizing multilevel analysis was required to fully explore the connection between SDGs, sustainability, and organizational effectiveness. Secondly, leadership roles and stakeholder participation in

reducing adverse effects on the environment, employees, and society were very crucial. Thirdly, the importance of SHRM in the promotion and execution of SDGs and the accomplishment of sustainable organizational performance was still an open question, despite the fact that previous research had shown a strong correlation between these practices and organizational success.

Summarising the current studies, we might identify six distinct issues associated with SHRM and gender equality. Firstly, several journals stated that SHRM was the only way for a company to adopt sustainability, and more investigation and literature reviews were required in this area (Piwowar-Sulej, 2021; Sharma et al., 2022). Secondly, to address the deficiencies of earlier research, future studies should, for instance, examine the many sustainability-oriented HRM approaches and concentrate on the key elements of HRM that contribute to its long-term sustainability (Piwowar-Sulej, 2021), broaden the study's geographic scope to include more nations (Guerci et al., 2016; Masri & Jaaron, 2017; Paillé et al., 2014; Tang et al., 2018; Zaid et al., 2018) and examine a wider range of industries (Gholami as cited in Piwowar-Sulej (2021)).

Thirdly, the innovative aspect of this study was its integration of Gender equality, SHRM, and the strategies for HRM Practitioners. Fourthly, to the authors' knowledge, this was the first study to evaluate this conceptual structure in conjunction with data from New Zealand, filling a void in the current literature by shedding light on the topic of sustainability in the electricity distribution business. Moreover, the author planned to interview employees, while previous research (Podgorodnichenko et al., 2022) only interviewed employers and managers.

Fifthly, since little had been discovered regarding this particular issue up to this point, a more extensive investigation was required to both improve our comprehension of this study's topic and to provide new information about it. Therefore, it appeared that a qualitative, inductive research technique was the best way to address the subject (Ryan et al., 2007; Wangler &

Jansky, 2021). Likewise, the results of Anlesinya and Susomrith (2020)'s study suggested that there had been a prevalence of quantitative methodologies in the field of SHRM research, while comparatively less attention had been devoted to qualitative techniques and mixed-method approaches.

2.5 Research Question

Historically, human resources (HR) had not exhibited a strong inclination towards addressing social and environmental concerns. However, it was imperative for HR departments to recognise the significance of these issues, particularly in light of the positive outcomes associated with the integration between HRM and sustainability. The organisation should take proactive measures to address the issue of HRM and gender equality, with the aim of greatly improving employee motivation and performance. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to provide an answer to the following primary research questions: What is the role of sustainable human resource management practices in achieving gender equality?

Chapter Three Research Methodology

This chapter was dedicated to analysing the research methods employed in this study. The text commenced with a comprehensive explanation of the researcher's philosophical position, which was thereafter proceeded by the qualitative research approach and the study methodology. The following two parts elaborated on the data gathering approach and thematic approach to evaluation employed for the analysis of data in the present study. Next, the researcher would present the ethical aspects.

3.1 Research Paradigm - Interpretivism

The interpretivism paradigm guided this investigation. Constructivist ontology was adopted by interpretivism which explained that human activities and perspectives continuously shaped social reality (Palagolla, 2016). In addition, people generated knowledge through active engagement with others in a specific context (Mason, 2018). This process allowed researchers to investigate and understand complex social processes. Thus, following the interpretivist perspective, the researcher emphasized the importance of exploring and understanding participants' experiences and subjective thoughts (Mason, 2018).

The current research focused on understanding the SHRM strategies or practices that an Electricity Distribution Business EDB adopted in New Zealand in a bid to attain 50/50 gender parity by the year 2024. The study contended that the significant work of engineers in the Electricity Distribution Business EDBs in New Zealand could answer these questions. As stakeholders, they lent themselves to the day-to-day running of the company and they had a higher degree of understanding, more technical skills, and more knowledge. The researcher was able to interact and discuss in depth with these engineers and analysed the vast data because they were able to share their skills. This research takes an interpretivist approach as its focus is

on understanding the meaning and experiences of the participants. Qualitative research methods will be provided in the next section.

3.2 Research Strategy - Qualitative Research

This investigation employed a qualitative research methodology for two main reasons. This investigation aimed to stress how SHRM practices or strategies are applied in EDB in New Zealand as well as how these are related to achieving gender fairness. As a result, a qualitative method was considered as more appropriate for this study. This was because in this study the ‘what, how, and why’ inquiries (Hennink, 2020) were better suited to qualitative methodology whereas quantitative methodology was useful in dealing with numbers to do with concerns or variables that could be measured.

In addition to this, the researcher recognized that the qualitative method was appropriate for this study because the objective of the study was to understand the perceptions and experiences of engineers, in order to gain greater insights into the SHRM strategies adopted by the leader in charge of the EDB. This qualitative study provided an opportunity for the researchers to have exact and individual evidence (Schreier, 2018) and to collect rich and varied accounts from interviews and or observations of the respondents, and other methods (Flick, 2018). Moreover, it was seen that the participants were willing to voice their opinions to add more value to the discussion (Kelemen & Rumens, 2008). This, however, added to the fact that the researcher was able to understand the position of the respondents and analyze their statements from their perspectives (Gavin, 2008). Therefore, the qualitative method was relevant in this case as this provided adequate information needed for the study.

3.3 Research Design

As a means of collecting qualitative data for this study, semi-structured interviews were utilised, and thematic analysis was used in the proceeding data analysis. These were the reasons for selecting the semi-structured interview and for the thematic analysis.

3.3.1 Semi-structured Interviews

The researcher opted to apply a case study as her foundation because of its adaptability and depth of coverage, both of which are great for delving into the complicated "fact" of gender equality and SHRM. On the other hand, choosing the best approach to data gathering and analysis might be challenging due to its adaptability (Thomas, 2017; Yin, 2003). In light of these difficulties, Thomas (2017) and Bryman (2014) advocated for research to establish apparent case selection prerequisites. Two factors, contribution, and data availability, are used to select a case in this research. On the basis of these two criteria, New Zealand may be considered the ideal scenario. The development of gender equality can be better understood by looking at New Zealand, which is considered a significant case. Since its initial days as a UN member, New Zealand has been a vocal proponent of gender equality (Parker & Donnelly, 2021). Moreover, Casey et al. (2010) noted that various nations have taken different approaches to promoting gender equality, for instance, Norway has instituted constitutional allocations, while New Zealand has favored a soft regulatory strategy of lobbying and positive reinforcement. Due to the dearth of research on SHRM practices and gender equality, New Zealand provides a fresh perspective. Another factor that contributed to the selection of New Zealand Electricity Distribution Business (EDB) was the data availability. The researcher's husband introduced the researcher to the EDB's newly appointed HR Manager. The researcher asked the HR Manager to identify potential participants without the researcher's husband's

involvement. These recommendations helped the investigator reach more likely inaccessible participants.

Moreover, in the context of qualitative study methodology, this research employed semi-structured interviews as a methodological approach to gather comprehensive proof from the opinions and experiences of the respondents. Qualitative interviews typically lacked a specific structure or followed a slightly organized format, whereas structured interviews were typically conducted in quantitative research (Dean, 2007). According to Collis and Hussey (2013), unstructured interviews involved investigators who did not formulate questions but instead focused on a limited number of themes that were anticipated to be addressed. Earlier, Laquimia (2010) indicated the necessity of having some set questions in semi-structured forms to provide the internal consistency and direction of the studies; as a result, making it easier for the people that intersect with the studies to engage in crucial discussions. As a result, based on the given theories and discussions, semi-structured interviews were dominantly used in the study case because they helped to guide and structure the conversations and under the assistance of the researcher much better data was gathered.

This methodology started the interviews with broad questions about the experiences of the participants which helped to build conversational attention (Bell, 2019). In particular, it was aimed at their professional experience, the application of SHRM in the particular EDB in New Zealand, and the effectiveness of the practices towards gender equity. For instance, questions such as "How many years have you been working in this industry", "Could you please explain regarding the company's commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion (DEI)?", and "What is your perception as a stakeholder regarding the Board's decision to make gender equality a top priority?". The participants were subsequently given basic questions that were pertinent to the topics of study. These questions were aimed at being open in order to allow the participants to express their feelings and thoughts freely (Cassell, 2015).

There were a total of eight questions in the interview guide. This information can be found in Appendix D. These topic-specific questions enabled interviewees to articulate their opinions, encouraged deep thoughts and ideas (Collis & Hussey, 2013), and helped in formulating well-rounded research questions. The engineers would justify the SHRM practices of the organization based on the actual events they had experienced. The interviewer put into the record the important issues or the gaps that came up during the discussion that could enable him to ask more questions.

In addition to this, the semi-structured interviews allowed for an innovative strategy owing to the absence of a rigid structure to the sequence of established questions (Bell, 2019). This means that semi-structured interviews would include more flexible measures that would include asking questions that were not entirely predetermined or that would depend on prior answers given. Likewise, the interviewers were able to ask other enticing or related questions in response to the answers of the interviewees (Cassell, 2015). Through this method, interview enquiries would promote interactions in the sessions hence facilitating the urge of interviewees to express their views, experiences as well as feelings. Hence, semi-structured interviews were utilised to provide pertinent information on SHRM practices in the EDB in New Zealand.

3.3.2 Thematic Analysis

The present study used a thematic approach to wonder about the SHRM strategies adopted by the leader of an EDB in New Zealand to achieve 50% gender equality as called for in the company's ESG booklet and to explore the employees' perceptions on the implementation of the strategy. Further, the researcher in this current study followed the thematic analysis of Braun and Clarke (2006) by trying to classify all field data in an organized manner and looking for interesting and recurring patterns that were relevant to the research question. Interpretivist research was valuable for examining many interpretations of a phenomenon (Saunders et al.,

2019). Thematic analysis allowed for a comprehensive examination of the data given by the respondents. It facilitated the organization and comparison of various viewpoints derived from the interviewees' life events, hence enhancing comprehension as well as analysis of the study's subject matter. The precise analytical processes will be explained in detail within the data analysis part.

3.4 Data Collection

This part will provide detailed information on the methodology used to gather data in this research. The present investigation was conducted in New Zealand. The individuals who met the criteria were chosen based on the study topic, and non-probability samplings such as purposive sampling and convenience sampling were used to save time and costs. Non-probability sampling was commonly utilized due to its practicality since the methods used to choose units for samples were significantly simpler, faster, and more cost-effective in comparison to probability sampling (Baran & Jones, 2016).

While the drawback of convenience sampling was it was frequently prone to prejudices since it might result in a low representation or a surplus of specific populations in the data set (Baran & Jones, 2016). The researcher performed a total of nine official semi-structured interviews. The participants were engineers and managers who work for an EDB in New Zealand.

3.4.1 Individuals taking part in the study

The selection of individuals in this research was based on three inclusion requirements. First, permanent employees who have worked at the company for more than 3 months since they were considered to already understand the organization's policies and goals. Second, engineers, both women and men. Third, experienced managers of an EDB company in New Zealand. The

decision to choose the managers would be premised on their considerable impact in creating policies, strategies, and business practices relevant to the idea of SHRM within the company under research. Moreover, they actively participated in the daily operations and possessed extensive knowledge of engaging in SHRM policies. Consequently, these comprehensive talks provided a plethora of valuable knowledge.

The research focused on examining the role of SHRM practices in achieving gender equality in the engineering industry specifically in a New Zealand EDB. The term "EDB" in this context specifically meant a local electricity distribution company in New Zealand. The staff were also local. The term "Engineer" denoted those who were born and educated in New Zealand or overseas and currently reside and work in New Zealand.

The investigator intended to conduct telephone interviews with the total of nine participants (engineers and managers) to explore the significance of SHRM practices in attaining gender equality. The number of samples was selected based on (Saunders et al., 2019) recommendation that at least five to twenty-five semi-structured interviews should be conducted. In addition, Morse (1994) proposed that qualitative investigators should have a minimum of six respondents to comprehend the phenomenon's essence. Qualitative investigators favoured a restricted sample number, provided that the backing proof adequately represented the viewpoints of the respondents. Consequently, the number of respondents was first established based on the lowest criteria for qualitative interviews.

The participants in this research exhibited a range of characteristics. They came from comparable experiences, such as electrical engineering, and ranged in their engineering and managerial expertise, which varied from two to more than 10 years. According to Bell (2019), sample variety assisted in improving the research's reliability and the theory's generalisation. A short description of the respondents and their firms was provided in the table below.

Table 3.1: *Details of Participants*

| Interviews No | Title | Years of Experience | Gender | Age Range | Ethnicity | Position |
|----------------------|---------------|----------------------------|---------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| Interview 1 | Participant A | 1 - 5 | Male | 25 - 35 | Caucasian | Engineer |
| Interview 2 | Participant B | 1 - 5 | Male | 25 - 35 | Asian | Engineer |
| Interview 3 | Participant C | 6 - 10 | Male | Above 45 | Middle Eastern | Engineer |
| Interview 4 | Participant D | 6 - 10 | Male | 36 - 45 | Asian | Engineer |
| Interview 5 | Participant E | 1 - 5 | Male | 25 - 35 | Asian | Engineer |
| Interview 6 | Participant F | 1 - 5 | Female | 25 - 35 | Indian | Engineer |
| Interview 7 | Participant G | Above 10 | Female | Above 45 | Asian | Engineer |
| Interview 8 | Participant H | 1 - 5 | Female | 25 - 35 | Indian | Engineer |

3.4.2 Procedures

This research involved an overall of nine official interviews. The investigator's husband was employed as an engineer at an EDB, yet, he did not have any subordinates under his supervision. Thus far, his contribution to the researcher's study had primarily been elucidating the company's environmental, social, and governance (ESG) objectives. He acquainted the researcher with the recently hired HR Manager, who had assumed the position after it had remained vacant for a year. In order to effectively address the conflict of interest arising from the researcher's spouse's employment at the same organisation, the researcher requested the assistance of the HR Manager to identify potential participants without any participation from the researcher's husband. These recommendations facilitated the investigator's connection to more respondents who would have been probably inaccessible. Indeed, there was no direct relationship or connection between the researcher and the participants.

The selection of participants was contingent upon consultation with the HR manager. These suggestions helped make it simpler for the researcher to approach more possible participants to whom she may not be able to contact. The researcher acquired nine respondents through this approach. Some invitations were refused since they might be too consumed with work to join interviews.

The researcher's spouse might potentially be a coworker of the participants. Nevertheless, the researcher's spouse had not contributed to the creation of the interview questions, the selection of participants, and would not be participating in the interview procedure. In order to avoid any potential conflicts of interest, the researcher proposed that her husband retained a clear separation from both the research process and any decision-making processes associated with the project. The researcher ensured the confidentiality of participants' names and replies, and her husband would not be granted access to them. The researcher further requested her supervisors to oversee the whole study process, which included data collection and analysis.

The researcher gave respondents an official invitation letter (Appendix A) and an information sheet (Appendix B) to notify respondents of the key subjects of the interviews. Subsequently, the researcher ascertained that these engineers and managers had agreed to participate in the interviews and finalised the time with them. She also allowed them to understand that they could refuse to respond to any specific inquiry and resign from the research at most three weeks following the interview period.

Furthermore, data privacy and obscurity were assured by the researcher. Prior to the interviews, the researcher delivered all the respondents' permission forms (Appendix C) to the respondents for authorization. Interviews for this research were performed in New Zealand, from April to May 2024. Interviews varied in duration from thirty minutes. The entire discussions were done in English to enable participants to convey their ideas most precisely and exactly, which prevented misconceptions and increased shared comprehension (Welch & Piekkari, 2006). The

researcher would anonymize all aspects of the participants and I would take care and protect their data. The data would be stored in Massey University One Drive and password protected.

3.5 Data Analysis

This research data was analyzed using the NVivo program. NVivo was a program that employed an inductive coding method and served as an accessible tool for inexperienced users, simplifying the process of coding for theme story synthesis (Elliott-Mainwaring, 2021). NVivo demonstrated its versatility by allowing the importation of several file formats including Word and PDF, also individuals could establish connections throughout documents and had the chance to present the results as text clouds, structures, and groupings (Elliott-Mainwaring, 2021).

The primary obstacles faced by qualitative researchers were subjectivity (influenced by the researcher's biases), validity, and responsiveness. This obstacle was arduous to surmount if researchers engaged in manual data analysis. NVivo facilitated the segregation of data obtained from respondents, researchers, and secondary sources. Thus, NVivo was a useful tool for doing data triangulation.

In addition, the researcher in this study followed the steps of thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), transcribing data, familiarizing with the material, generating codes, assessing the codes, generating themes, and writing the research. In addition, this study also used the coding strategies of themes and classifications as proposed by Corbin and Strauss (2008). This section thus provides a general description of the various activities that were carried out within the context of this thematic analysis in the present study. The investigator transcribed word by word, in detail, onto a typist, each minute detail of the interview tape, to

enable her to repeat the conversations once more and record, word for word, the answers given by the respondent, and the sounds and particulars of the speech.

This made it possible for the investigator to develop written material that could be subjected to yet further analysis and evaluation (Hennink, 2020) in an effort to improve the understanding and interpretation of the results of the study (Bird, 2005). The investigator diligently verified the progress of each and every exact translation undertaken so as to eliminate errors in understanding and also accurate and complete presentations of each and every verbatim translation were done and captured. The investigator took part in the familiarization aspect of the data in relation to the study after the transcripts of the interviews were completely available. Furthermore, the investigator systematically went through all of the material and once more listened to the audio recordings in order to delve into the interview material and resolve any possible confusion. Following a comprehensive process of becoming acquainted with the data, the investigator proceeded to encode it. The present research utilized semi-structured interviews, requiring the comparison and classification of the notes from interviews for comprehensive data evaluation as well as theory generation.

The investigator implemented the coding methodology outlined by Corbin and Strauss (2008) in three sequential phases: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. During the initial qualitative data evaluation procedure known as the open coding phase, the investigator identified and labelled noteworthy segments throughout the data set. The data was divided into coherent and distinct sentences and coded using ideas represented by one phrase or term. The relevant context-specific information was later retrieved to gain a deeper knowledge of the respondents' viewpoints and prevent any misinterpretations caused by the lost information, hence facilitating additional evaluation. During the process of axial coding, the investigator began to establish relationships amongst the codes that were created in the preceding stage. The original codes and their relevant data were comprehended, following by the

interconnection between the codes was made available, and the connected codes were reorganized, resulting in a compilation of broader and more abstract classifications together with their associated excerpts. During this stage, the investigator consolidated many codes that recurred and were pertinent to the study's inquiries into overarching themes. Ultimately, the investigator examined the connection between the probable themes and created a comprehensive classification during the selective coding phase in order to create a cohesive and all-encompassing representation. All of the major themes were preserved at this stage as some of the themes earmarked for removal at this stage might be useful later in the course of the study.

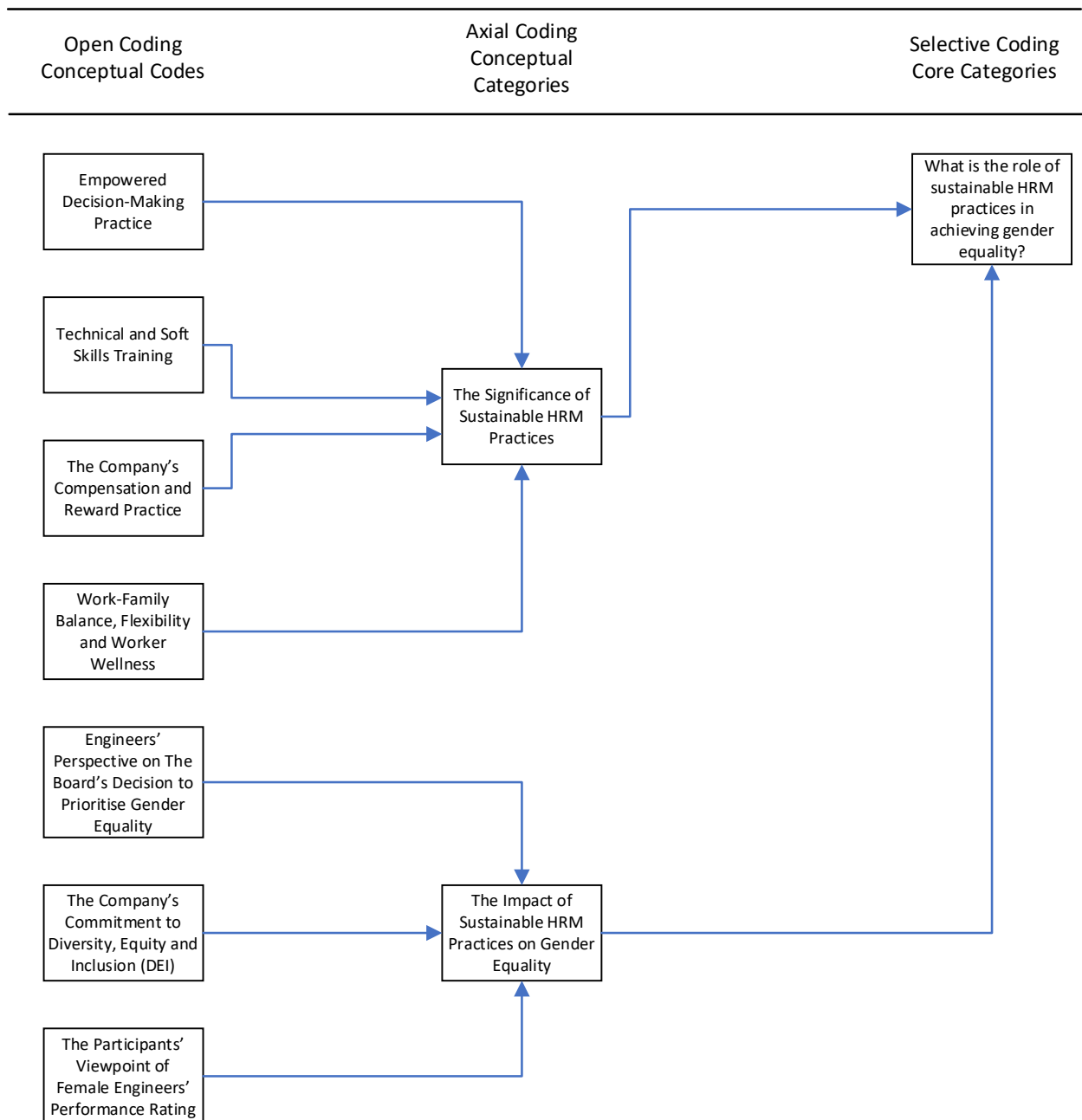
After the stage of coding, the researcher followed the evaluation steps of evaluation as suggested by Terry (2017) to ascertain the compatibility of the central themes with the codes as well as whether the data collected addressed the aims of the study. The subsequent evaluation critique was centered on the core themes as well as the segment of text under every theme attributable to the code. The researcher conducted a rigorous assessment by examining each portion of text that corresponded to every code in relation to the discrete themes for relevance to the data extracts. The reviewer thoroughly reviewed the possibility that each and every future theme would accurately reflect the primary objective of the relevant extracts and confirmed that the extract of information was relevant and resourceful to the thematic subject. The next phase of evaluation was carried out on the entire database, examining the possibility of several themes being left out during the first coding phases.

Finally, the investigator evaluated the relation and effectiveness of each individual topic in relation to the overall data and generated the thematic mapping. Moreover, the investigator additionally clarified and honed the main themes, and conducted an analysis of the pertinent information. The investigator ensured that the topic title was succinct and unambiguous, accurately representing the fundamental significance of the topic's content. To verify that the

themes corresponded to the codes and that the entirety of the data provided solutions to the study inquiries, the investigator followed the evaluation steps suggested by Terry (2017) subsequent to the coding step. The topics and code excerpts connected to every theme were the primary focus of the initial evaluation step.

For example, one of the main characteristics of SHRM practices was work-family balance, flexibility, and worker wellness. The work-family balance, flexibility, and worker wellness was one of the codes, the investigator read through the respondents' answers in detail, and should the answer be deemed aligned with the code, the statement was highlighted and classified into the code. It was noted that the codes and the answers were sometimes overlapping and overreaching, such as, five statements were classified into one code, hence, NVIVO was utilized to overcome this confusion. The investigator conducted classification one step at a time. After that, the investigator ran a framework matrix, the framework matrix consolidated many codes and statements and provided a comprehensive clustering based on provided demographic data.

Figure 3.1: *The Role of Sustainable HRM Practices in Achieving Gender Equality*



3.6 Validity

Qualitative study's standards consist of being credible, which can be attained by long-term participation, careful monitoring, and the use of triangulation; being transferable, which can be attained via thorough and complete clarifications; being reliable, which can be attained by means of thorough records and the establishment of a verification track; and finally, being

confirmable, which can be attained by the use of colleagues' review, verification by members, and reflective writing (Ahmed, 2024).

Moreover, building on previous work by Denzin and Lincoln (2017) the investigator in this research employed various kinds of data to ensure construct validity. The three kinds of data that needed to be triangulated were academic publications, company HR policies documents, and transcripts of semi-structured interviews. For instance, data collected from semi-structured interviews was double-checked with data collected from academic publications and firm HR policy documents.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

The investigator and supervisors talked and examined several potential ethical concerns in this study, following which the Massey Human Ethics Committee evaluated the study as being of significant risk.

Upon selecting suitable candidates, the investigator inquired regarding their inclination to take part in this study to ensure their involvement was unforced. The Invitation Letters (Appendix A) were dispatched to prospective participants with the purpose of providing them with an introductory comprehension and aiding them in making a decision regarding their participation in this interview. Prior to the interviews, participants were provided with the Information Sheet (Appendix B) and Participant Consent Form (Appendix C) for their acknowledgment and agreement, indicating their comprehension of the study-associated matters and their entitlements. The Information Sheet provided details regarding the subject matter, the estimated duration of the interview, and the entitlements of the interviewees. It was demonstrated that participants had the option to discontinue their involvement in the research at any given moment. Subsequent interviews were done in a respectful way as planned and documented for

the purpose of analysis with the participants' consent. To maintain data privacy, identifiable information was anonymized, and the interview records and transcriptions were stored in the investigator's personal computer and Massey University One Drive, password protected. The data would be retained for a maximum duration of five years, and subsequently, they would be safely destroyed.

Chapter Four Findings

This study investigated the SHRM practices employed by leaders in an EDB in North Island, New Zealand to attain gender equality in the engineering industry. Data was gathered through interviews with eight electrical engineers employed in the EDB. The interviews' transcripts underwent a thematic analysis to initially recognise and subsequently clarify the primary themes that arose from the participants' comments. This chapter provided the findings pertaining to the one study enquiry stated below. The recommended source for this chapter was the publication by (Mariappanadar, 2020). This thesis examined one research question:

“What is the role of sustainable HRM practices in achieving gender equality?”.

The structure of this chapter was designed to effectively answer the aforementioned question. Moreover, this chapter presented the results obtained after initially recognising the two primary topics that arose from the interviews. The initial section outlined the process of incorporating SHRM strategies at an EDB in New Zealand, as perceived by engineers. The second section of the study also investigated the relationship between SHRM techniques and gender equality in the engineering industry. Ultimately, this research had resulted in the development of a thorough model that elucidated the discoveries of this investigation.

4.1 The Significance of SHRM Practices

This section presents the findings of the perspectives of the interviewed participants, who are eight engineers, regarding the firm's implementation of SHRM procedures. The study examined whether these practices aligned with the ideal traits described in the literature by Mariappanadar (2020) for SHRM.

4.1.1 Work-Family Balance, Flexibility and Worker Wellness

The results indicated that all respondents confirmed that the EDB had shown a dedication to promoting gender equality through good implementation of work-family balance, flexibility, and worker wellness policies. Participants E and F, both male and female engineers, provided the following information in response to the question on the company's efforts to achieve work-family balance, flexibility, and worker wellness:

He stated,

Employees are allowed to work from home 2 days per week, flexible working hours. But it is highly depends on managers' decisions. For well-being there is a well-being workshop monthly (Participant E).

She mentioned,

The company is very supportive at work-family balance. We have weekly meeting available to discuss about the work and family balance. We have 100% flexibility from the company. They offer work from home option if we needed. Company is good at understanding workers wellness. I had a situation where I cannot go to office due to my health issue. My Manager and my GM understood me very well, they used to call me every day to ask about my health (Participant F).

She pointed out,

I have flexible hours; I can work anytime between 6am to 6pm and I can also work from home. There is also a well-being workshop monthly and \$300 fitness allowance annually (Participant H).

Another participant reported receiving flexible working hours, adhoc WFH, a \$300 annual health and wellness benefit, access to a social club, and the opportunity to participate in afternoon wall climbing (Participant D).

Therefore, it was evident that the company had implemented good work-family balance, flexibility, and worker wellness. This was primarily attributed to the provision of flexible

working hours (allowing employees to work anytime between 6am to 6pm), the option to work from home two days per week, monthly well-being workshops, a \$300 annual health and wellness benefit, and access to social clubs. Both male and female engineers who were interviewed acknowledged these factors as key contributors to the company's good implementation of work-family balance, flexibility, and worker wellness.

4.1.2 Technical and Soft Skills Training

The findings indicated that most participants had stated that the EDB had promoted SHRM by providing technical training and soft skills training to all engineers, regardless of gender, except for Participant B and Participant C who only had on-the-job training. Unfortunately, none of the engineers reported receiving any environmental training or training focused on green competency.

She pointed out,

Yes. I received the technical and soft skills training from the company. I received the project management training from the company, and I took PSCAD course online and company paid for this PSCAD course. They are always supportive for professional growth (Participant F).

He mentioned,

I have received plenty of technical training (one on ones with manager or colleagues to explain things to you or show you new concepts). I have not received soft skills training beyond corporate trainings like “how to write emails” etc (Participant A).

She elaborated,

Yes, I acquired technical and soft skills training during my first few years working in the company. Yet, due to budget constraints, no recent trainings were provided (Participant G).

In summary, the research findings indicated that engineers had not been provided with environmental training or green competency-driven training, which aligned with the principles of SHRM. However, engineers had received technical training and soft skills training from the company. This included on-the-job training, extensive technical training through one-on-one sessions with managers or colleagues to explain new concepts, corporate trainings on email writing, online and periodic soft skills training such as team building and effective team engagement, IT training, project management training, online PSCAD course, and technical trainings known as WTC1a & WTC1B, as well as safety training.

4.1.3 Empowered Decision-Making Practice

The results suggested that most participants highlighted the lack of evidence that EDB had shown dedication to promoting empowered decision-making procedures for all staff members. Only two interviewees stated that as engineers, their technical experiences and skills were the most important factors considered by their senior leadership team (SLT). When asked, "Has this company implemented empowered decision-making practices?" the interviewees provided the following explanations:

No, I do not think so – all decision-making power still rests with GMs. Doesn't feel like others can have influence other than to try and convince SLT to make a change (Participant A).

No, the decision-making was made by GMs and SLTs. If employees have proposals they have to talk to their managers or the HR (Participant E).

No, a lot of micro-managing happening on the manager and general manager level (Participant G).

It might be, as engineers, our technical experiences and skills are the most considered. Our SLT rely on us. However, for non-technical matters, all are decided by SLT or GMs (Participant B).

Overall, the research findings indicated that EDB had not effectively adopted empowered decision-making, a key trait of SHRM as defined by Mariappanadar (2020), for all employees, particularly engineers. This is due to the authority to make decisions remaining exclusively with GMs and SLTs. It is necessary to make employees believe that they have a stake in the decisions that affect them and hold them accountable for the outcomes of those decisions (Pigeon et al., 2017; Saremi, 2015). The manager's function shifts from leading and monitoring tasks to mentoring and encouraging, addressing solely the most fundamental problems, and making sure that employees possess the knowledge, data, perspective, and connections they need to produce much better outcomes (Saremi, 2015).

4.1.4 The Company's Compensation and Reward Practice

The findings indicated that nearly all participants expressed a lack of knowledge, understanding, and certainty about the company's adopted compensation and reward methods. Only a single engineer affirmed that the company had established commendable reward methods. In response to the researcher's inquiry regarding the company's compensation and reward methods, participants provided the following explanations:

They pointed out,

I have not had one besides salary and \$ 300 wellness benefit. I am not sure about it (Participant B and Participant D).

She revealed,

To be honest, there is no clear communication on the method they use for the compensation and reward practices (Participant G).

She mentioned,

Company is good at reward practices. There will be instant appreciation. Definitely they do appreciate when you do good projects. There will be yearly bonus (Participant F).

Overall, the findings of this section indicated that the EDB and general managers should enhance transparency and provide clear communication regarding the techniques employed for compensation and reward procedures. Transparency and effective communication on compensation and reward policies were essential for fostering mutual trust among stakeholders, namely owner, managers and employees. Furthermore, adopting pay and incentive strategies that incorporated intrinsic, extrinsic, and altruistic elements was a key feature of SHRM practices (Mariappanadar, 2020).

4.2 The Impact of SHRM Practices on Gender Equality

4.2.1 The Company's Commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)

The findings suggested that all respondents affirmed that the organization had demonstrated a dedication to DEI specifically gender equality by prioritizing the hiring of female candidates for new positions wherever feasible, aiming for a 50% representation. In response to the question regarding the company's commitment to DEI, participants provided the following explanations:

I have heard about that in several meetings held by one of the managers last year, but I cannot remember. If it is about the equality treatment regardless of gender, race and belief, as far as I know, the company has been conducting this practice since a long time ago (Participant H).

Likewise, another female engineer also pointed out,

Currently the company is hiring more females to achieve 50/50 gender staff. The company is also employing qualified people of different culture (Participant G).

Similarly, another female engineer, participant F also stated that the company was very supportive, it always used to encourage her professionally, and it gave equal importance and respect to everyone. She mentioned that as a female engineer, she supported gender equality and the company always tried to replace female replacement with the female only.

While Participant A, a male engineer, had indicated that apart from striving for a 50% proportion of female employees, the organization did not demonstrate much dedication to DEI as there was no presence of a diversity committee and minimal effort was made to acknowledge and celebrate religious or cultural festivals.

He pointed out,

As far as I am aware, the company has committed to gender equality in hiring new roles (50% female where possible). Other than that, I think there is not much commitment to DEI. I do not think there is a diversity committee or anything like that, which I find unusual. There is not much done to celebrate things like Eid (Participant A).

Two male engineers also indicated that the EDB aims to attain a 50% level of gender equality, however they acknowledged the presence of obstacles.

As I read in the Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) Booklet, the company aims to have 50% of gender equality. It had been approved by the Board Member. However, one of the managers who is in charge of ESG mentioned that it was a bit difficult to achieve since NZ Laws prohibit racial, sex, and age discrimination. It is up to the hiring manager and also prioritise business progression (Participant B)

It is not suitable to be considered a top priority as long as the NZ laws prohibit discrimination. In my opinion, the board should have published the guidance for this matter, which I think they are not keen (Participant D).

In summary, the research findings indicated that EDB had actively embraced DEI by prioritizing the recruitment of more females to achieve a balanced gender representation of 50/50 among its staff. The company also strove to ensure equal treatment for all employees, regardless of their gender, race, or beliefs. This commitment to gender equality was explicitly stated in the ESG Booklet, with the aim of attaining a 50% gender balance. The Board Members had given their approval. One participant noted that, in addition to the aforementioned factors, there was not much commitment to DEI, due to the absence of a diversity committee. Nevertheless, one of the managers responsible for ESG affairs remarked that attaining this goal posed a challenge due to the legal restrictions in New Zealand that forbade discrimination based on race, gender, and age. The three participants (Participants B, C, and D) who voiced their opinion regarding the Human Rights Act likely did so because they had limited exposure to discussions about gender equality in engineering in New Zealand, and because the company did not actively promote gender equality. As a result, they likely believed that meeting the company's needs was more important than addressing gender equality in engineering. Moreover, New Zealand is a frontrunner when it comes to human rights, but their Human Rights Act suffers from a lack of understanding, insufficient enforcement, and focused on comparisons, so they don't tackle the multi-faceted forms of oppression that Māori women and others experience (Reilly, 2019). Additionally, only a small percentage of businesses in the country are obliged to provide information on gender equality issues (Reilly, 2019).

4.2.2 Engineers' Perspectives on the Board's Decision to Prioritise Gender Equality

In response to the researcher's question about the participant's perspective on the Board's decision to make gender equality a top priority and to pursue the environmental, social, and

governance (ESG) goal of attaining a 50/50 gender split in new hires by the conclusion of Q1 2024, the participants offered the following arguments.

I think it is acceptable since the business I am currently involved in is male dominated, however I am still figuring out what the relationship between ESG and gender diversity. I would prefer this 50/50 gender split as an optional goal rather than a more-important goal. Because it has been known that electrical engineering, mainly in power engineering, is always male dominated starting from the university. Gender diversity must be started at the beginning of university intake rather than the job recruitment intake (Participant H).

Moreover, participant G, a female engineer also mentioned that she thought that management would like to explore the impact of having more female staff in a perceived male-dominated industry.

On the other hand, a male engineer mentioned,

It is not suitable to be considered a top priority as long as the NZ laws prohibit discrimination. In my opinion, the hiring process should be only considering any job-related requirements, gender diversity should be the last thing to consider when it is hard to decide between certain candidates (Participant B).

Likewise, participants C and D, who were male engineers, expressed similar viewpoints to Participant B, stating that gender equality was not a top priority within their organization.

He argued,

It is not suitable to be considered a top priority as long as the NZ laws prohibit discrimination. In my opinion, the board should have published the guidance for this matter, which I think they are not keen on (Participant D).

To sum up, the research findings indicated that a number of male engineers expressed the view that prioritizing gender equality was not suitable as long as discrimination was prohibited by New Zealand laws. This highlighted the absence of socialization and seminars focused on gender equality within the workplace, particularly for male engineers, as many continued to

hold such beliefs. Additionally, one female engineer expressed her preference for the 50/50 gender split as an optional objective rather than a higher priority aim.

4.2.3 The Participants' Viewpoint of Female Engineers' Performance Rating

The participants provided the following arguments in response to the researcher's inquiry regarding whether female engineers had to achieve a higher performance rating than their male counterparts in order to be promoted.

Yes, I feel like to take women is serious to the profession, we need to perform higher than men, especially for young women, they have family to take care of kids and all. If they take any break it can affect long term commitment, so they are not likely to be promoted (Participant H).

In addition, both participants F and G, who were female engineers, expressed similar viewpoints. They argued that female engineers had to be given equal opportunity in performance ratings, and to achieve this, there should be no specific work tasks for male or female engineers:

No. I think this situation really depends on the specific work environment. In an ideal world, promotion should only consider a person's capability of being to the next level. However, in reality some higher management members might not value females and are hard to be convinced that a female can do the job as well as or better than a male. A person cannot be internally promoted if the management does not support or reward that (Participant B).

While Participant E pointed out that there were not enough female engineers observed, however in the company, female engineers had the same workload and performance requirements as male engineers. Likewise, participant A mentioned that there did not seem to be that many female engineers at higher levels of team leadership or management.

Overall, the research findings indicated a scarcity of female engineers in senior positions such as senior team lead or senior management. However, male engineers asserted that female engineers faced similar workloads and performance expectations. Moreover, multiple female engineers expressed the need for equal opportunities in performance evaluations, with one participant emphasizing that as a female engineer, she had to outperform men in order to be taken seriously in this field.

4.3 SHRM and Gender Equality Model

The present research was based on semi-structured interviews conducted with 8 electrical engineers employed at an EDB in New Zealand. These engineers received their education in New Zealand and other countries. They had extensive experience working with several New Zealand companies involved in the electricity distribution business. Currently, they were employed at an EDB, a company located on the North Island of New Zealand.

They provided their perspectives on the implementation of SHRM at EDB, drawing from their extensive expertise. These findings offered valuable insights into the importance of SHRM practices and their influence on gender equality in the engineering profession, particularly in the case of EDB in New Zealand. The subsequent model provided a concise overview of the findings presented in this chapter (refer to Figure 4.3 below).

The research findings, depicted in Figure 4.3, highlighted the importance of implementing SHRM practices to achieve gender equality. These practices had to be executed proficiently and effectively. According to the results, firms that prioritized work-family balance, flexibility, and worker well-being were seen as implementing SHRM practices most successfully by engineers, regardless of gender. When selecting a firm and opting to remain with it, female engineers would consider the company's reputation and rules around work-life balance,

flexibility, and employee well-being. A good work-family balance and flexibility policy was crucial in promoting gender equality, particularly in the male-dominated engineering business. The engineers also valued firms, managers, and GMs who possessed a strong grasp of worker wellness, both in terms of physical and mental health.

This study also found that environmental training or green competency-driven training was not implemented by the company or EDB. In fact, green competency-driven training was one of the characteristics of SHRM practices which played an important role in promoting environmentally friendly attitudes, and this would help Environmental Management Systems (EMS) reduced their negative environmental impacts and safeguarded the overall wellness of ecosystems (Mariappanadar, 2020). The EDB primarily offered comprehensive training programs in technical and soft skills to engineers of all genders. This training was designed to enhance engineers' productivity and enable them to operate with greater competence and efficiency.

This investigation also discovered that the EDB had not put into effect empowered decision-making methods. The authority to make decisions was still laid exclusively with General Managers (GMs) and Senior Leadership Teams (SLTs). According to one participant, there was a significant amount of micromanagement occurring at the level of the manager and general manager. In addition, this study revealed that none of the participants had comprehension or knowledge regarding the company's compensation and reward methods. One participant expressed that there was a lack of transparent communication regarding the methodology employed for the implementation of pay and reward practices. These two factors did not align with the attributes of ideal SHRM practices. Mariappanadar (2020) asserted that meeting the expectations of key stakeholders and enhancing organizational profitability, while also being socially responsible, might be accomplished by using pay and reward methods that encompassed both intrinsic, extrinsic, and altruistic factors. Additionally, he highlighted that

all workers within the organization might benefit from organizational structure rules that promoted sustainability through empowered decision-making.

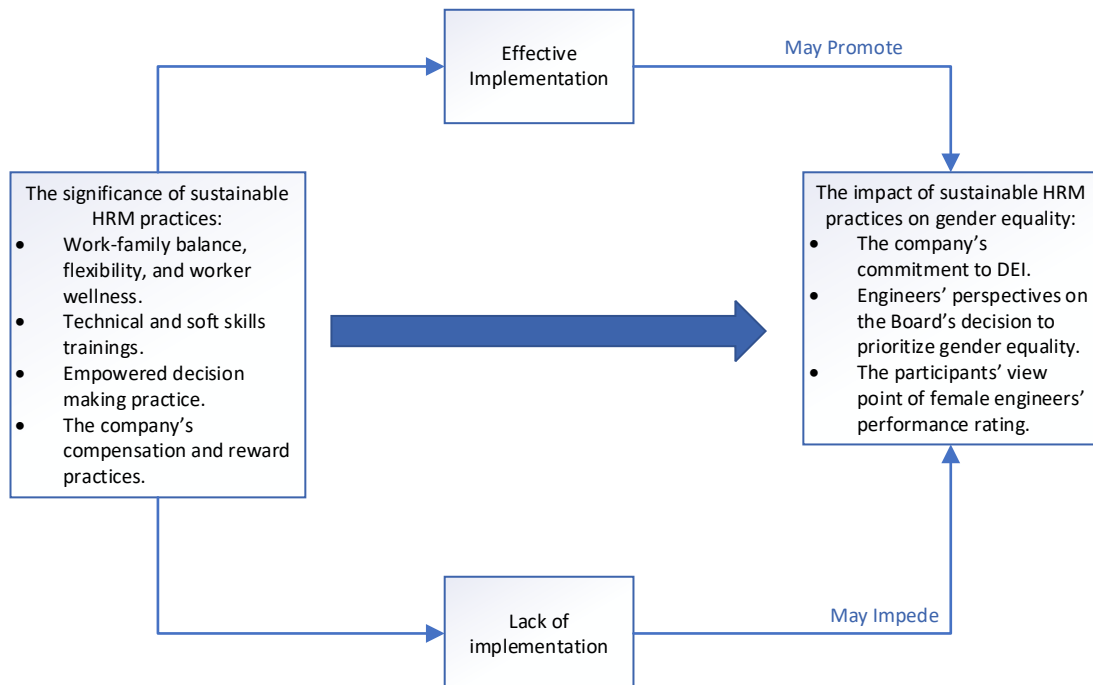
During the stage of assessing the impact of SHRM practices on gender equality, it was observed that the company's dedication to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) was acknowledged by engineers. Specifically, the company had shown commitment to DEI, particularly in terms of gender equality, by giving priority to the recruitment of female candidates for new positions whenever possible, with the goal of achieving a 50% representation. A female engineer mentioned that the organization was presently recruiting additional women in order to attain a gender-balanced staff with an equal representation of males and females.

Regarding the board's decision to prioritize gender equality, male and female engineers had divergent attitudes. Four male engineers concurred that gender diversity should not be deemed a primary concern as long as New Zealand laws prohibited discrimination. They argued that the hiring process should solely focus on job-related qualifications, with gender diversity being a secondary consideration when faced with difficulty in choosing between candidates. However, a female engineer held the view that the Board's discussion was satisfactory, but she would prefer the 50/50 gender distribution to be considered as an optional objective rather than a more significant one. Historically, the field of electrical engineering, particularly in power engineering, had been predominantly male, even at the university level. She argued that gender diversity should be prioritized during university admissions rather than during employment recruitment.

Lastly, the researcher would want to address the perspective of participants regarding the promotion of female engineers. A female engineer contended that in order for women to be taken seriously in the profession, they had to outperform males, particularly young women who had the additional responsibility of caring for their homes and children. Any interruption in their work could have a detrimental impact on their long-term dedication, thereby reducing

their chances of being promoted. Two female engineers also contended that female engineers should receive equitable opportunities in performance evaluations. To accomplish this, there should be no gender-specific assignments for engineers. Meanwhile, a number of male engineers had seen a scarcity of female engineers in higher positions such as team leads or managers. However, within the organization, female engineers were subjected to the same workload and performance expectations as their male counterparts.

Figure 4. 1: *SHRM and Gender Equality Model*



Chapter Five Discussion

This chapter will analyze the empirical findings within the framework of the current body of literature. This chapter will commence by examining research findings on the need to implement sustainable HRM (SHRM) practices to advance gender equality within an EDB or company operating in the predominantly male-dominated engineering industry. Next, the text will proceed to demonstrate the influence of SHRM practices on gender equality. Eventually, the discussion will shift towards an examination of the SHRM and gender equality model presented in Section 4.5.

5.1 The Significance of SHRM Practices

The initial inquiry in this study examined the importance of SHRM practices in advancing gender equality within an EDB. During the interviews, the electrical engineers provided responses to this issue based on four specific features, as documented in Section 4.1. This chapter would analyse the primary discoveries and juxtapose them with the pertinent literature.

5.1.1 Work-Family Balance, Flexibility and Worker Wellness

The empirical findings of this research indicated that the EDB located in the North Island of New Zealand had shown a dedication to implementing policies related to work-family balance, flexibility, and worker health. This was a crucial initial measure in advancing gender equality. All participants expressed positive feedback regarding the company's commitment to maintaining a healthy work-life balance, offering flexibility, and prioritizing the well-being of its employees. These findings reinforced the conclusions of numerous prior research, which indicated that maintaining a balance between work and family responsibilities and having flexibility in the workplace were SHRM strategies that promoted gender equality (Chung &

van der Lippe, 2020; Connell, 2005; Fudge, 2011; Peters & Blomme, 2019) and gender justice (Connell, 2005).

The findings were consistent with one of the EDB's Human Resources (HR) policies, which was point 2 declarations on Flexible Working policy. It mentioned four policies regarding flexible working. Firstly, the flexible work program of the company was a covenant for all its employees, and it should be understood that the company reserved the right to scrutinize and cancel any agreement with the employees pertaining to flexibility in work hours (when an employee works from home or another extra place) at any place at any time. The second, flexible working arrangement covered all possible means of altering productive work in the course of execution of this strategy, which involved working days, work hours, and place of work. Third, there was a provision made by the employee where on a continuous basis for periods agreed upon or contracted, the employees were not permitted to work overtime and the normal hours worked ought to be accurately recorded where the employer had requested it. Fourthly, it was the employee's responsibility which means he or she had to ensure that on assigned workdays or days of obligation, he or she would be available and that he had meant to a working space that was appropriate for undertaking the given task, and that there was boundaries drawn between work and personal lives as required by Health and Safety at Work Act Of 2015.

Furthermore, the results also corroborated one of the HR Policies of the EDB, which was the declaration under point 2 of the Wellness and Healthcare Program Policy. It pointed out four following policies regarding Wellness and Healthcare. Firstly, any person who was employed by the firm full- or part-time was also included in the risk employee wellness and health regulations. Secondly, it was one of the values of the company that, employees were persuaded to take part in activities that would increase their wellness & contentment. Thirdly, the employees after a reasonable period would be eligible for earning protection cover as well as

life and critical illness insurance covers sponsored by the company. Fourthly, each year, employees might claim back up to \$300 for things such as health club or swimming pool memberships and lessons, or for the purchase of sports equipment (not clothing). Thus, both HR policies really supported the implementation of one of the SHRM practices, namely work-family balance, flexibility, and worker wellness for employees, particularly the engineers at EDB.

Likewise, the implementation of professional wellness and healthy living schemes, such as nutrient intake initiatives, psychological mentoring, emotional wellness support, sports promotion, rehabilitation facilities, and physiological therapy, might enhance the business environment and make the company more appealing to all potential employees, regardless of gender (Campos-García, 2022).

Nevertheless, Lewis and Humbert (2010) argued that simply implementing work-life balance or flexibility in the workplace was insufficient for promoting gender equality. They emphasized the significance of identifying and questioning gender stereotypes in the sciences, expertise, approaches, and technologies, and this highlighted the necessity of transitioning from policy to actual implementation.

The similarity of this research's findings could also be attributed to effective government efforts in promoting work-family equilibrium and implementing policies that facilitated flexibility. New Zealand had the top position in the global rating for balancing work and life (Bywater, 2024). Indeed, without the implementation of a work-life balance policy by the organization, gender equality was likely to not meet expectations. Thus, it was recommended for engineers, especially female engineers, to choose a company that was well-known for prioritizing a positive work-life balance. This suggested a greater probability of attaining gender parity within the organization, in contrast to other companies.

Therefore, in order for the EDB to be chosen as a company for female engineers to work and establish a solid and sustainable reputation in the public's perception, the owners and managers of the EDB had to improve the image of their business by enhancing and maintaining the work-family balance, flexibility, and worker wellness system within their organization. By adopting this approach, organizations could effectively address the requirements of their employees, so fostering gender equality, establishing enduring employee connections (retention), and cultivating trust within the community.

5.1.2 Technical and Soft Skills Training

The findings indicated that all participants had stated that the EDB had promoted SHRM by providing technical training and soft skills training to all engineers, regardless of gender, except for Participant B and Participant C who only had on-the-job training. Unfortunately, none of the engineers reported receiving any environmental training or training focused on green competency and social awareness training. This contradicted two of the traits of SHRM practices described by Mariappanadar (2020) as follows. First, in order to help the company keep ecosystems healthy by lowering their environmental impact, it was important to use green competency-driven personnel training procedures that were environmentally focused in nature. Second, the needs of the organization, its workers, and its stakeholders might be better aligned through training practices that prioritized social awareness.

According to the participants, the EDB company had purportedly incorporated ESG practices into its operations, as stated in the Company's ESG Booklet. Furthermore, the company's Board Members had established a target of achieving 50% gender equality. Currently, the training conducted by the EDB exclusively emphasized the enhancement of employee competencies related to their job responsibilities, specifically through technical and soft skills training. Therefore, the EDB should implement training programs aimed at enhancing engineers'

expertise and comprehension of environmentally sustainable practices, such as the utilisation of renewable energy, waste management, and environmental risk management. Additionally, these programs should aim to foster a greater sense of empathy among employees, encouraging them to be more attuned to their natural surroundings.

5.1.3 Empowered Decision-Making Practice

The present investigation revealed that EDB had not successfully implemented empowered decision-making for all employees, particularly engineers. Only two interviewees stated that their technical experience and talents were the primary elements considered by the managers or SLT. The present analysis revealed that the power to make decisions continued to be held solely by the General Manager (GM) and SLT. This contradicted the established research findings (Mariappanadar, 2020; Tortia et al., 2022), which indicated that empowered decision-making was one of the key traits of SHRM. Organisation, its workers, and the environment in which the organisation operated might all reap the benefits of organisational structure policies that promoted sustainability via empowered decision-making (Mariappanadar, 2020). Empowering HR was essential for attaining collaboration, creativity, and it could motivate employees to tolerate increased responsibility and a quicker tempo by promoting higher levels of satisfaction (Tortia et al., 2022).

The term "empowerment" refers to a management strategy in which workers are given more say in organisational matters and given the resources they need to do their jobs well (Lashley, 1995). Research had demonstrated that sustainable work assets, such as participation in making choices and independence, had a good relationship with wellness and enhanced motivation (Tortia et al., 2022; Tortia et al., 2020). The empowered decision-making that incorporated sustainability should encompass monetary, human/social, and ecological considerations or aspects in order to satisfy every significant stakeholder and preserve the wellness of the

environment (Mariappanadar, 2020). In summary, empowered decision-making played a crucial role in promoting sustainability as it directed individuals and organisations toward ecologically aware and influential decisions.

5.1.4 The Company's Compensation and Reward Practice

The findings indicated that nearly all participants expressed a lack of knowledge, understanding, and certainty about the company's adopted compensation and reward methods. Only a single engineer affirmed that the company had established commendable reward methods. Most engineers reported receiving merely a salary and an annual wellness benefit of \$300. In addition, there were no incentives, whether monetary or non-monetary, for employees who demonstrated environmentally conscious behaviour. Furthermore, managers did not communicate with employees about potential rewards for engaging in environmentally conscious practices. In summary, the findings of this section suggested that the pay system and reward mechanisms at EDB were inadequate and were not consistent with Mariappanadar (2020) prior research on the key traits of SHRM practices.

Adopting compensation and reward strategies that incorporated intrinsic, extrinsic, and altruistic elements was a key feature of SHRM practices (Mariappanadar, 2020). Intrinsic and extrinsic stimulants, which allowed incentives and acknowledgments, were combination of HRM strategies which were adopted by organisations to encourage workers to exert greater effort for the best results (Rynes et al., 2004). Employers utilised the concept of total reward to establish a harmonious equilibrium among intrinsic and extrinsic incentives, with the aim of successfully motivating staff (Elrayah & Semlali, 2023).

Sustainable workers' pay and reward methods should incorporate employee-centric motivators while also considering stakeholder generosity (Mariappanadar, 2020). Altruistic motivation

aimed to enhance the well-being and happiness of workers and numerous stakeholders, such as spouses/partners, youngsters, parents in need of care, individuals with disabilities, suppliers, and the natural world (Dovidio et al., 1990; Mariappanadar, 2020). In order to adequately incentivize individuals, a comprehensive reward scheme needed to encompass the five primary components of rewards: compensation, bonuses, harmony between work and personal life, acknowledgement of how they perform, and growth and advancement prospects (Elrayah & Semlali, 2023).

On the other hand, New Zealand was confronted with a gender disparity in earnings of 11.8%, which exhibited no indications of imminent reduction (Parker & Arrowsmith, 2012). The rest of the inequality was described by unknown causes, which suggested that implicit prejudice and judgments regarding women in job settings were to blame for roughly 80% of it (Pacheco et al., 2017). The level of engagement of women with preschool-aged kids in the salaried job market in New Zealand was considerably smaller than that of other OECD nations (Sarvaiya & Eweje, 2016). This could be attributed to the inadequate availability of daycare, limited flexibility regarding job arrangements, and a significant prevalence of little income (DoL cited in Sarvaiya and Eweje (2016)).

According to McGregor et al. (2016), implementing a "right to enquire" initiative is suggested by the investigators as a practical approach to tackle the disparity in gender earnings among women engineers in New Zealand. The study reveals that there is a dearth of disclosure regarding pay and compensation within the engineering industry, which has a detrimental effect on women (McGregor et al., 2016). Some potential solutions to the disparity in salaries include review and transparency mechanisms, government involvement, and assistance with infrastructure (Hall, 2007). New Zealand must persist in its attempts to attain gender equality in salary because women's salaries are not sufficiently representing their growing education (Pacheco et al., 2017).

This study's findings could be attributed to the study's small sample size, consisting of only 8 participants. Additionally, there were research constraints stemming from the HR Manager's unwillingness to participate in the interview due to their recent appointment (less than 3 months). Consequently, it remained unknown whether female engineers receiving performance-based pay have equal or lower compensation compared to their male counterparts. Therefore, it might not offer sufficient data to elucidate all of the EDB's pay and reward policies or initiatives. The findings of this study indicated that engineers, regardless of gender, desired to earn greater trust from the firm or EDB in order to get knowledge and establish transparent communication regarding the company's approach to compensation and reward policies.

Overall, the findings of this section indicated that the EDB and managers should establish remuneration and incentive methods that possessed intrinsic and extrinsic elements. This would help to motivate employees and encourage the sustainability of the EDB. They also had to enhance transparency and provide clear communication regarding the techniques employed for compensation and reward procedures. Transparency and effective communication on compensation and reward policies were essential for fostering mutual trust among stakeholders, namely owner, managers, and employees.

5.2 The Impact of SHRM Practices on Gender Equality

The next aim of this research was to identify the impact of SHRM practices on gender equality. This would be achieved by examining three specific aspects: company commitment to diversity, equality, and inclusion (DEI); engineers' perspectives on the board's decision to prioritise gender equality; and participants' perspectives on the performance rating of female engineers.

This research found that there was a scarcity of female engineers in senior positions at EDB such as senior team leaders or senior management. However, male engineers emphasized that female engineers faced similar workloads and performance expectations. Additionally, several female engineers expressed the need for equal opportunities in performance evaluation and there should be no specific work tasks for male or female engineers. One participant also emphasized that as a female engineer, she had to perform higher than male engineers in order to be taken seriously in this field, and if they took any break due to family matters, they were not likely to be promoted.

This study's finding contradicted Dupont et al. (2013), Type 2 of SHRM, the concept of Socially Responsible Human Resource Management (SR-HRM) which comprised human resource practices that aligned with the ideals of corporate social responsibility (CSR), such as impartiality, fairness, openness, equality for all, autonomy, and so on. Indeed, the implementation of SR-HRM had a positive impact on several worker outcomes, such as happiness and dedication to the organisation, and as a result, this might lead to enhanced organisational outcomes (Dupont et al., 2013).

The findings were also inconsistent with one of the EDB's HR Policies classified as point declarations with respect to the Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Program. It stated three following policies regarding EEO. Firstly, the firm in its commitment to Equal Employment Policies Equity Action Plan had put in place an EEO Action Plan which focused on identifying and eliminating any and all discrimination in an organization. Secondly, there would be no distinctions in the hiring and treatment of any present and future workers or subcontractors based on such factors as gender, spouse status, religion, ethnicity, age, active political engagement, profession, sexual orientation, and marriage. Thirdly, forms of promotion and issuance of training appointments would be directed by the principle of non-discrimination on the basis of merit with regard to enhancing opportunities.

Consistent with the findings in this research, the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions cited in Amalia and Amira (2016) explained that the concept of the glass ceiling effect referred to the phenomenon where women faced limited representation in greater power positions within hierarchical structures, as well as in higher-paying positions.

On the other hand, this research findings as mentioned earlier were inconsistent with the established theory. The Respect, Openness, and Continuity (ROC) paradigm or theory illustrated the SHRM procedures which ensured official provisions for a fair chance for every worker and addressing prejudice, which led to enhanced organizational inclusivity and increased heterogeneity (De Prins et al., 2014). "Respect," "Openness," and "Continuity" have been established by the researcher as the foundation of SHRM: a renewed emphasis on respect for workers (Respect); a concentration on ecological consciousness (Openness); a concentration on the future of the company, considering sustainability (Continuity) (De Prins et al., 2014).

The results of this study were inconsistent with the principles of respect and continuity in ROC theory. In contrast to the aspect of respect, participant H, a female engineer, asserted that she had to outperform male engineers in order to be regarded seriously in this profession. Additionally, she noted that taking breaks for family-related matters reduced the likelihood of being promoted. In contrast to the aspect of continuity, there was a lack of female engineers in high-ranking roles at EDB, such as senior team leaders or senior management. Whereas gender equality was an important objective of sustainable development goals (Leal Filho et al., 2023).

The finding aligned with the research conducted by Wright and Cropanzano (2000), whose results indicated that women's professional results were significantly impacted by salary and advancement imbalance, with adverse consequences for organizations such as poor

involvement in the workplace and wellness leading to poor organizational dedication and a high rate of resignations.

On the other hand, some male engineers pointed out that the hiring process should only consider any job-related requirements, gender diversity should be the last thing to consider when it was hard to decide between certain candidates. Nevertheless, the conclusions of Teigen (2015) contradicted this viewpoint by arguing that in Norway, the Minister of Trade and Industry and the Labour Party played significant functions in establishing a foundation for the widespread support of the compulsory gender quota on company boards. Thus, the implementation of gender quotas in New Zealand, both in private and government firms, would be highly beneficial for promoting gender equality. However, it might provide initial challenges in terms of execution.

Moreover, the research finding indicated that three male engineers expressed the view that prioritising gender equality was not suitable as long as discrimination was prohibited by New Zealand laws. Consistent with the finding in this study, The Human Rights Act of 1993, article 21, clause 1, subsection a, defined the forbidden reasons of discrimination for the intent of this Act: (a) gender, (b) the state of marriage, (c) religious faith, (d) righteous faith, (e) colour (f) racial background, (g) ethnicity. The finding was also consistent with research showing that in engineering, gender inequality was often unrecognized or often taken for granted by engineers. There was a study in Spain, that male engineers who were less sympathetic to gender equality were senior male engineers or older and had high incomes (Recalde-Esnoz et al., 2022). Most male software engineers stated that the lack of women in engineering was due to a lack of knowledge and closeness and these male engineers also did not see sexist behavior in their teams (Canedo et al., 2023). Therefore, gender equality initiatives should include a greater number of men (Burgos et al., 2023) and implement programs to raise awareness among male engineers of the importance of gender equality (Recalde-Esnoz et al., 2022). These initiatives,

if implemented by the EDB, would certainly encourage sustainable efforts and would change the views of male engineers from previously not prioritizing gender equality, to being more understanding and aware that gender equality must be prioritized in the engineering industry, especially in EDB.

Hence, despite the government's establishment of the 1993 Human Rights Act, EDB, an engineering company predominantly staffed by males, had to establish a diversity committee. The EDB had to also prioritise and highlight in its company policies the significance of treating female employees equitably and on par with their male counterparts in all SHRM practices. Regularly disseminating these regulations was crucial for enhancing staff satisfaction, consumer satisfaction, diversity, sustainability, and the overall success of the EDB.

The research findings suggested that certain participants (Participant E and Participant H) pointed out that gender diversity must be started at the beginning of university intake rather than the job recruitment intake since it had been known that electrical engineering, mainly in power engineering, was always male dominated starting from the university. In keeping with this study's results, Fox et al. (2020) argued that there was a need for broader knowledge by the carers and educators on engineering and the way it contributes to the well-being of people and society, in order to help increase the presence of females in engineering studies in New Zealand. They also explained that the role of the teaching profession has an impact on female students' study choices at university, but the biggest influence comes from parents in their efforts to encourage female students to choose engineering majors which have been dominated by males (Fox et al., 2020). Consequently, parental encouragement and advice had a positive impact on the female students' decision-making processes regarding engineering majors. The level of parental support and involvement obtained by females positively related to their likelihood of choosing to pursue engineering subjects at university.

5.3 Model of SHRM Practices and Gender Equality

This model examined the implementation of SHRM practices by leaders in an Electricity Distribution Business (EDB) located in the North Island of New Zealand (NZ). This model also provided an understanding of the relationship between SHRM practices and gender equality. Full and effective implementation of SHRM practices, as outlined in Mariappanadar (2020) features of SHRM, greatly facilitated the attainment of gender equality within NZ enterprises. Gender equality was an integral component of sustainability. The NZ Government aimed to establish sustainable organisations or firms, which in turn enhanced the companies' public reputation.

The research on the model of SHRM practices and gender equality would offer valuable insights to multiple stakeholders. Specifically, it would provide the NZ government with information on the current condition of SHRM practices in companies, particularly in one of the EDBs. This would enable the government to promote the adoption of SHRM practices across various organisations in NZ. Additionally, there still was no evidence that the business leaders and managers in New Zealand in the engineering field managed to embrace the entire techniques of SHRM. Other scholars, on the other hand, would become beneficial sources, providing references, materials, information, and various source materials that would be useful in further studies and development of this field.

This model building had been based on a very useful perspective since the data was collected from men and women who were experienced engineers and have worked in New Zealand for several years. Therefore, this model would offer assistance and motivation to first-time managers and engineers in the field of EDB, who are new in the engineering field. In New Zealand, this model assisted the managers in implementing SHRM and encouraging equal opportunities for gender. This helped them improve their business processes and build more comprehensive SHRM practices, resulting in delivering better gender equality outcomes.

Therefore, this research also gave more understanding of women engineers' equal employment chances in a field that has been stereotyped as male dominated.

There were three drawbacks of this model. There might be other practices related to SHRM that had not been identified in this study due to the limited number of participants. In addition, the focus of the present study was mainly on the opinions and experiences of the engineers of one EDB in NZ with regard to SHRM practices and gender equality issues. This model would be improved with some constructive comments of the managers and the engineers working in numerous EDBs situated in NZ. Also, regarding limited accessibility, scant materials and time limitations, in the current research sample, the authors only managed to conduct interviews with 3 female engineers and 5 male engineers. In order to complement the deficiency of this model, it would be possible and preferable to interview a large group of women engineers to obtain more comprehensive insights about this issue.

Chapter Six Conclusion

This investigation was aimed at surfacing the influence that the practices of sustainable HRM (SHRM) could make in the field of gender equality in the engineering industry, with the electricity distribution business (EDB) being the main concern. This chapter would span the conclusions of the primary findings of the research. It would commence with a brief sub-section on the findings of the study concerning a particular research question, before proceeding to the relevance and implications of that kind of findings in the study. Thereafter, this study would address its limitations and suggest recommendations for future studies in the same area.

6.1 Summary of Findings

The main aim of this study was to investigate the influence of SHRM practices on the achievement of gender equality in an EDB or engineering company located in the North region of New Zealand. This section is organized in such a way that it contains the conclusion of this study that is consistent with the specific research question that was provided in the chapter one. The principal one to be noted was the significance of SHRM practices which could be classified into four aspects: work-family balance, flexibility and worker wellness; technical and soft skills training; empowered decision-making practice; and the company's compensation and reward practice. The findings were that the EDB demonstrated a strong dedication in terms of the policy implementation related to employees' work-family balance, flexibility and their well-being. All interviewed participants, specifically 8 engineers comprising of 5 male engineers and 3 female engineers, expressed favourable and commendable views regarding the company's policies. These findings bolstered the findings of prior research that suggested that maintaining a balance between work and family life, as well as offering flexibility in the workplace, were effective HRM techniques that promote gender equality. The company's \$300

annually health and wellness benefit, which was part of the worker wellness incentive, was a matter of concern for engineers and contributed to the company's perceived worth among both male and female engineers.

This finding was consistent with New Zealand's renowned as a nation that held the top rank globally in terms of achieving a harmonious balance between work and personal life. Despite the existence of a work-family balance policy, research indicated that women still bore greater responsibilities than men in terms of childcare and home tasks. Thus, it was recommended that female engineers look for EDBs that had a very good working culture in relation to work-family balance as these companies stood a better chance of creating gender equality.

Moreover, the research findings suggested that some of the SHRM practices at EDB were not in tandem with the traits of SHRM practices as per Mariappanadar (2020). These practices involved technical and soft skills training, empowered decision-making, and the reward and remuneration elements of the firm. EDB had initiated attempts of training both technical and soft skills to all engineers at EDB without bias on gender. Unfortunately, the offering of specific training on green competency and social awareness was missing in the EDB. Where training was provided during the implementation, this element of SHRM practiced at EDB was not within the borders of convincing SHRM practices. Therefore, it could be stated that the implementation of training elements at EDB was still less than optimal and still did not meet the traits of SHRM.

Concerning the practice of empowered decision-making in the EDB, the research findings demonstrated that whoever recommends the making of decisions is the General manager and the Senior leadership team (SLT) and that is the only level who exercises this decision. This did not align with the characteristics of SHRM practices. It has been observed that the decision-making power delegated to employees helps in achieving sustainability goals because it

motivates employees to make decisions that are responsible for the company and the environment, as well as embracing the necessary changes.

6.2 Contributions

The positive effects of SHRM practices on the promotion of gender equality in the context of engineering in New Zealand, with emphasis on the case of EDB on the North Island of New Zealand were of great importance in this study. This study provided a unique view regarding the relationships between SHRM practices and gender equality in engineering. For instance, what some people may not be aware of is how these two elements were strongly related. Furthermore, it had been identified that the implementation of SHRM practices was still less effective in EDB, and prospective solutions to deal with these problems were based on previous research. This research also presented a vital viewpoint regarding female and male engineers in New Zealand. In principle, this would enable EDB managers to understand the importance, relevance, and impact of the implementation of SHRM practices toward enhancing gender equality and a better and more sustainable working environment. It also identified the gaps in the current implementation of SHRM and provided suggestions based on the findings.

The significance of these findings for EDB and the engineering sector in New Zealand lied in the inclusion of both female and male engineers as participants in this research. In addition, these findings could be highly valuable for managers, including both experienced professionals and newcomers to the engineering industry or EDB in New Zealand. Furthermore, the government could benefit from these results as they provided insights into the specific areas that required attention when implementing SHRM practices. In order to promote the attainment of gender equality, active cooperation from multiple stakeholders was necessary.

6.3 Limitations

The current research still had various constraints. The primary constraint of this research was the limited sample size of participants in the semi-structured interviews. Specifically, there were only 8 engineers involved, comprising of 3 female engineers and 5 male engineers. The data could potentially be enhanced by increasing the number of participants in this research, particularly by conducting interviews with a greater number of female engineers. Furthermore, conducting an interview with the HR manager of the organisation might yield further insightful and nuanced perspectives. Regrettably, the HR Manager declined the interview request owing to their recent appointment, which occurred less than 3 months ago. This decision was made because the HR Manager was not engaged in the initial development of the Board's gender equality policy. Thus, the researcher was unable to address the recruitment and selection aspects of the HR Manager's job description.

The importance of this study lies in the fact that it draws on the personal experiences and professional interpretations of the engineers involved in order to fill a gap in the current literature and provide new insights into the phenomena under investigation. Another endeavour to minimise limitations was choosing the right persons to take part in this research. Specifically, three of the eight individuals involved were senior-level employees with ten years' experience and six to ten years' experience in the field. The other participants who were suggested likewise possessed the background information that the researcher required to address her research topics.

6.4 Recommendations for Future Work

Future research endeavours might consider enlarging the sample size and employing a combination of methodologies, such as semi-structured interviews and survey research. To better comprehend complicated phenomenon, mixed-methods study integrates qualitative and

quantitative techniques (Greene & Caracelli, 1997; Shorten & Smith, 2017). This approach would enable the analysis of substantial amounts of response data, leading to more comprehensive generalisations. Investigators are able to delve into many viewpoints and find connections between complex levels of study issues using this method (Shorten & Smith, 2017).

Furthermore, the organisation had the capability to gather data pertaining to female engineers, male engineers, and HR managers from many EDBs located in both the North Island and South Island of New Zealand. Researchers should increase their direct and active engagement with HR in future advancements. Hence, it was imperative to conduct additional studies in order to enhance the quantity of scholarly publications on SHRM practices and their influence on gender equality in New Zealand. Additional research was also required to investigate the claims made by certain engineers that prioritised gender equality was not suitable as long as discrimination is prohibited by New Zealand Laws (Human Rights Act) and hiring decisions should solely be based on job-related requirements.

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Appendix A – Invitation Letter



MASSEY
BUSINESS
SCHOOL

Dear [intended participant/s],

My name is Luki Winniastri and I am a Master of Business Studies student from the Massey Business School, Massey University. I am emailing you to invite you to be part of my research project about the role of sustainable HRM practices in achieving gender equality.

The purpose of this study is to explore sustainable human resource management practices in one of the electricity distribution companies in New Zealand. If you participate in my research project, you will be involved in a recorded interview by telephone that will take up to 30 minutes of your time. Your interview will be confidential, and you will not be identified in any publications.

The interviews will be transcribed by me and returned to you for your review. Should you agree with the transcript, I will need you to sign the Authority for The Release of Transcripts. All data collected will remain under secure storage on Massey University's computer system, accessible only by the researchers.

Participation is voluntary, you have the right to decline to answer any question; withdraw from the study; ask any questions about the study at any time during participation.

For more information, I have also enclosed several documents such as the Information Sheet, Authority for The Release of Transcript Sheet, and Consent Form.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Ohu Matatika 2, Application OM2 23/68. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Professor Fiona Te Momo, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Ohu Matatika 2, email humanethics2@massey.ac.nz.

Thank you very much for taking the time to read my email. I would like kindly to ask you to participate in this research study.

Best Regards,

Luki Winniastri

Appendix B – Information Sheet



Massey Business School, Private Bag 11 222
Palmerston North, 4442, New Zealand

The Role of Sustainable Human Resource Management Practices in Achieving Gender Equality: A Case Study of a New Zealand Electricity Distribution Company

INFORMATION SHEET

My name is Luki Winniastri and I am a Master of Business Studies student from the Massey Business School, Massey University.

My research is about the role of sustainable HRM practices in achieving gender equality (one of the UN's sustainable development goals).

This study focuses on the contribution that sustainable human resource management practices play in bringing about gender equality at a New Zealand electricity distribution business (EDB) or company. I am interested in your EDB because it has environmental, social, and governance (ESG) goals which include achieving a 50/50 gender split among new hires by the end of Q1 2024. This is an important goal as the perception that engineering is a male-dominated career persists.

The Research Purpose

This study will investigate the role of sustainable HRM practices in achieving gender equality in the engineering industry. The involvement of enterprises in sustainable HRM has become increasingly significant due to environmental and societal challenges. New Zealand has pledged to work towards the implementation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. One of the SDGs is gender equality and in New Zealand, there is still a long way to go to reach this goal. For example, in the engineering sector, only 16% of engineers are female (Stats NZ, 2015). This study seeks to contribute to our understanding of gender equality in the engineering sector by exploring sustainable HRM.

Research question

What is the role of sustainable human resource management practices in achieving gender equality?

Invitation to participate in research

Your company has given permission to conduct this research. Your participation is voluntary. Your participation or non-participation in this research will not have an impact on your employment.

Your participation would involve a recorded interview that would take up to 60 minutes of your time. Your interview will be confidential, and you will not be identified in any publications. The interview would take place at a location that is convenient for you. You are welcome to bring a support person.

I will ask questions about the implementation of equal employment practices for male and female employees in the organization; the company's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI); organization's strategies which are employed to stay updated with current sustainable development goals; steps that have been taken by the company in terms of prioritizing flexibility, work-family balance, worker wellness; employee reward practices; empowered decision-making practices.

The interviews will be transcribed by me and returned to you for your review. We will then analyze the results and complete a short, anonymized report.

All data collected will remain under secure storage on Massey University's computer system, accessible only by the researchers.

Your rights

If you decide to participate, you have the right to decline to answer any particular question; to withdraw from the study; to ask any questions about the study at any time during participation; and to provide information on the understanding that you will remain anonymous unless you give permission to the researcher. You will be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded. You also have the right to ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview.

You can withdraw from the study in three (3) weeks after signing off the Authority for The Release of Transcript Form.

Ethics

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Ohu Matatika 2, Application OM2 23/68.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Professor Fiona Te Momo, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Ohu Matatika 2, email: humanethics2@massey.ac.nz.

Project contacts

Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions at any stage of your involvement with this project.

The Researcher: Luki Winniastri, +64 [REDACTED], [REDACTED]@massey.ac.nz

Project Supervisors:

Dr Tanya Jurado, +6469519103, T.R.Jurado@massey.ac.nz

Dr Beth Tootell, +6469517907, B.L.Tootell@massey.ac.nz

Appendix C – Participant Consent Form



MASSEY UNIVERSITY
TE KUNENGA KI PŪREHUROA
UNIVERSITY OF NEW ZEALAND

Massey Business School, Private Bag 11 222
Palmerston North, 4442, New Zealand

The Role of Sustainable Human Resource Management Practices in Achieving Gender

Equality: A Case Study of a New Zealand Electricity Distribution Company

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM - INDIVIDUAL

I have read and understood the Information Sheet attached as Appendix I. I have had the details of the study explained to me, any questions I had have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time. I have been given sufficient time to consider whether to participate in this study and I understand participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study up to three (3) weeks after the interview.

1. I agree/do not agree to the interview being sound recorded. (if applicable include this statement)
2. I agree/do not agree to the interview being image recorded. (if applicable include this statement)
3. I wish/do not wish to have my recordings returned to me. (if applicable include this statement)
4. I wish/do not wish to have data placed in an official archive. (if applicable include this statement)
5. I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Declaration by Participant:

I _____ [print full name]_____ hereby consent to take part in this study.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Ohu Matatika 2, Application OM2 23/68.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Professor Fiona Te Momo, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Ohu Matatika 2, email: humanethics2@massey.ac.nz.

Appendix D – Interview Questions



Massey Business School, Private Bag 11 222
Palmerston North, 4442, New Zealand

The Role of Sustainable Human Resource Management Practices in Achieving Gender Equality: A Case Study of a New Zealand Electricity Distribution Company

Interview Questions:

1. Tell me about yourself. How long have you worked here? How long have you been an engineer/manager? Where else have you worked?
2. Could you please explain about the company's commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion (DEI)?
3. What is your perception as a stakeholder regarding the Board's decision to make gender equality a top priority?
As we are aware this EDB has environmental, social, and governance (ESG) goals which include achieving a 50/50 gender split among new hires by the end of Q1 2024.
4. In your opinion, do female engineers have to have a higher performance rating than male engineers in order to be promoted? If yes or no, please explain the reason in your opinion?
5. Have you ever received technical and soft skills training? Can you please explain.
6. Could you please explain about the company's compensation and reward practices?
7. What steps are you aware of that the company has taken in terms of achieving work-family balance, flexibility and worker wellness?

8. Has this company implemented empowered decision-making practices? If it has/has not, could you please explain?

The Researcher:

Luki Winniastri, +64 [REDACTED],

Email: Luki.Winniastri.1@uni.masse.y.ac.nz

Appendix E – Ethics Approval Letter



16/02/2024

Dear: Luki Winniastri

Re: Ethics Application - OM2 23/68 - The Role of Sustainable Human Resource Management Practices in Achieving Gender Equality in Engineering Industry: A Case Study of a New Zealand Electricity Distribution Company

Thank you for the above application that was considered by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee:

Ohu Matatika 2 at their meeting held on **Thursday, 7 December 2023**

On behalf of the Committee I am pleased to advise you that the ethics of your application are approved.

Approval is for three years. If this project has not been completed within three years from the date of this letter, reapproval must be requested.

If the nature, content, location, procedures or personnel of your approved application change, please advise the Secretary of the Committee.

Yours sincerely

Professor Craig Johnson
Chair, Human Ethics Chairs' Committee and Director (Research Ethics)