

Gender Equality in Leadership: HR's Role in Shaping Women's Career Roadmaps in the Pharmaceutical Industry

Areti Georgopali¹, Panagiotis Kontakos²

^{1,2} Hellenic Open University, UCLAN

Abstract

Despite significant progress in women's professional advancement and the promotion of diversity in the workplace, senior leadership positions across various industries, including the pharmaceutical sector, remain predominantly occupied by men. Throughout their reproductive years and into menopause, female professionals encounter numerous obstacles that hinder their progression to higher hierarchical levels. Organisational interventions aimed at transforming workplace culture and fostering diversity and inclusion are essential for their professional growth; however, evidence from the pharmaceutical field regarding these interventions is limited. This research employed a qualitative phenomenological approach, drawing on data from questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with twelve pharmaceutical leaders from the UK and Greece. It explored perceptions of barriers and enablers impacting women's career development, attributes and leadership styles for effective leadership, awareness of allyship for women and the extent of organisational support for their upward mobility. Thematic analysis revealed limited awareness and engagement in allyship initiatives, despite recognition of the crucial role that allies — regardless of gender — play in facilitating women's career advancement. This highlights the need for self-education, training on bias and discrimination as well as, the development of organisational initiatives to promote allyship. Five core themes emerged for effective organisational support including empowerment strategies (e.g., women's affinity groups, leadership and mentoring programs and educational events for skill enhancement), family-focused policies, educational initiatives (such as training on bias, diversity, equity, and inclusion training), inclusive hiring strategies and measures ensuring equal compensation. These findings underscore HR's critical role in designing and implementing innovative and targeted approaches to eliminate gender inequalities in the pharmaceutical industry.

Keywords: allyship; compensation; education; empowerment; policies