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GENDER DIFFERENCES IN BUSINESS AND ORGANIZATIONAL DECISION-MAKING: IMPLICATIONS FOR GENDER EQUALITY

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Abstract

The effectiveness of work largely depends on the employees and their decision-making abilities. Research indicates that gender differences in decision-making can influence management practices, organizational effectiveness, and overall performance outcomes. Although women and men possess equal intellectual capabilities and should be treated equally, their decision-making approaches often differ, offering complementary strengths. These differences underscore the importance of viewing gender-based decision-making styles as enriching rather than hierarchical and highlight why achieving gender equality remains critical. To optimize decision-making within individuals and groups in business and organizational settings, it is essential to understand both the advantages and limitations associated with the decision-making processes of each gender. Based on an extensive review of scholarly books and articles, along with empirical data collected through the Melbourne Decision Making Questionnaire completed by 133 participants, this study first analyses and discusses gender differences in individual decision-making within business and organizational contexts. This analysis provides the foundation for examining how the gender composition of groups influences group decision-making, highlighting the importance of promoting gender equality in organizational decision-making processes —an issue of growing significance in the developed world.

Keywords: *Gender, Decision-Making, Gender Equality, Business, Organizations*

1 INTRODUCTION

Decision-making is a fundamental cognitive process that individuals engage in continuously. On average, adults make approximately 35,000 conscious decisions per day (Sahakian & Labuzetta, 2013), with decisions in business and organizational contexts shaping leadership, strategy, and performance outcomes. Research suggests that individuals make an average of 122 decisions per day (Michaelides, 2022). Understanding how decision-making is influenced by gender is crucial for improving organizational practices, particularly in the context of increasing demand for gender equality in leadership and decision-making roles. This paper researches the relationship between gender and decision-making in business and organizations, exploring how gender influences decision-making processes and the importance of achieving gender equality in these domains (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Research suggests that decision-making is influenced by a variety of factors, including cognitive and social elements that vary between individuals (Halpern, 1997). Neuroscientific studies have highlighted how structural differences in the brains of men and women can lead to different approaches to decision-making, especially under complex or high-stakes conditions (Haier et al., 2005). Gender has been shown to play a significant role in shaping decision-making styles, with men and women exhibiting distinct patterns in cognitive processing (Benko & Pelster, 2013). While the literature underscores the importance of gender in decision-making, it remains fragmented, particularly in how these dynamics operate within organizational settings.

Despite the growing body of research on gender differences in decision-making, there remains a lack of comprehensive studies examining the inter-

section of gender and decision-making specifically within business and organizational contexts. Existing literature often overlooks how gender composition in teams influences collective decision-making and fails to explore why gender equality in decision-making is vital for organizational success (Eagly & Carli, 2003; Apesteguia, Azmat, & Iriberri, 2012). Without addressing these gaps, organizations may miss opportunities to enhance team dynamics and optimize decision-making processes, potentially limiting their performance and inclusivity (Hoogendoorn et al., 2013). As a result, organizations may not fully capitalize on the diverse perspectives that gender-diverse teams offer, which could ultimately affect their overall effectiveness.

The study builds on previous research using the Melbourne Decision Making Questionnaire (MDMQ) to explore gender differences in self-esteem and decision-coping strategies, with a focus specifically on under-researched decision-coping patterns vigilance, hypervigilance, buck-passing, and procrastination, in business settings. It challenges the assumption that higher self-esteem leads to better decision-making (Baumeister et al., 2003). The research advocates for inclusive leadership evaluations, emphasizing the value of diverse decision-making styles for organizational success (Bouckenooghe et al., 2007) and offers insights into gender's impact on decision styles among younger professionals, with implications for leadership and business strategies.

The main aim of this paper is to explore the role of gender in these decision-making dynamics within business and organizational settings. It investigates gender influences at both the individual and group levels, specifically analysing how gender shapes decision-making styles and how the gender composition of teams affects collective decision-making processes (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Moreover, this paper focuses on the importance of gender equality in business for promoting inclusive and effective practices. Beyond the behavioural effect of gender on decision-making, there is an ethical need to address why gender equality matters. Gender, like birthplace or family background, is an unchangeable factor that influences how individuals are treated (Voices of Youth, 2011). Differences between men and women should not justify unequal treatment. Gender equality ensures fairness by providing equal opportunities to contribute and lead based on merit, driving inclusivity and performance in organizations (Mackow-McGuire, 2016; Naidu & Naidu, n.d.).

First research question (RQ1): *How does gender affect decision-making in business and organizations at the individual level?*

Second research question (RQ2): *How does gender composition influence group decision-making in business and organizations?*

Third research question (RQ3): *Why does gender equality in decision-making in business and organizations matter?*

Research Question 4 (RQ4): *Do gender-based differences exist in decision making in business and organizational settings?*

Answering these questions offers both theoretical and practical insights. This paper contributes to improving decision-making efficiency in business and organizational contexts. Theoretically, it advances the understanding of gender as a cognitive and social factor in decision-making (Eagly & Carli, 2003; Halpern, 2012). Practically, it supports the optimization of decision-making processes in businesses and organizations, where team dynamics and inclusivity are increasingly important (Bear & Woolley, 2011; Catalyst, 2020). Recognizing and leveraging gender-based strengths can create more balanced, resilient, and effective management of professional relationships (McKinsey & Company, 2020; Ely & Thomas, 2001; Buljan Šiber et al., 2023).

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Decision-making is one of the most complex and critical cognitive processes, especially in organizational and business contexts. It is shaped by cognitive, social, and situational factors, with gender emerging as a key variable in how individuals approach and execute decisions. Research suggests that men and women often adopt different strategies and behaviours, affecting individual and group

outcomes. Organizational effectiveness relies heavily on employee contributions, and decision-making efficiency can vary based on gender-related factors. Therefore, understanding gender differences in decision-making and their impact on business performance has become an important area of research (Haier et al., 2005; Minasyan & Tovmasyan, 2020).

Neuroscientific research has identified notable functional and structural differences between male and female brains. For instance, women tend to exhibit a significantly greater volume of white matter, which facilitates integrative thinking across distributed neural networks, whereas men typically demonstrate greater concentrations of grey matter, associated with localized information processing and task-specific functions (Haier et al., 2005). These differences do not imply variation in overall intelligence or capability but suggest that men and women may employ distinct cognitive strategies in problem-solving and decision-making. Within the dynamic and often relationally complex environments of modern organizations, such variation may manifest in differentiated yet complementary decision-making patterns.

At the group level, gender composition has been shown to influence team processes and outcomes. Empirical findings suggest that gender-diverse teams often demonstrate enhanced problem-solving, creativity, and decision quality—particularly when interpersonal dynamics are managed inclusively (Bear & Woolley, 2011). Nonetheless, the benefits of equality are contingent upon the presence of equity and mutual respect, underscoring the importance of not only recognizing gender differences but also ensuring equal opportunity and voice in decision-making contexts.

Beyond cognitive and organizational considerations, the issue of gender in decision-making also intersects with broader ethical and social concerns. Individuals do not choose immutable characteristics such as their biological sex, the socio-cultural environment into which they are born, or their early familial circumstances. However, these unchosen factors shape how individuals are perceived and treated across their lifespan (Voices of Youth, 2011). In this regard, gender equality in decision-making is not merely a question of performance or cognitive style but also one of fairness and justice.

While acknowledging that men and women may exhibit different tendencies or preferences in decision-making, it is essential to emphasize that such differences should not be interpreted as indicators of superiority or inferiority. Rather, they reflect the diversity of human cognition and social experience. Gender equality does not suggest that men and women are identical, but rather that both are of equal value and should be afforded the same opportunities, responsibilities, and rewards in both private and public spheres (Mackow-McGuire, 2016; Naidu & Naidu, n.d.). In organizational decision-making, the unique strengths of both genders should be regarded as mutually reinforcing, contributing to more effective and inclusive managerial practices.

2.1 Gender and individual decision-making in business and organizations

Eagly and colleagues conducted several studies on gender and leadership. One such analysis (Eagly, Karau & Makhijani, 1995) found no significant differences in overall leadership effectiveness, though women excelled in less traditionally masculine roles and men in more masculine-defined ones. A later study (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt & van Engen, 2003) reported that men tend to be more assertive and competitive, while women are generally more supportive, empathetic, and relational in workplace decision-making. Caprino (2016) similarly found no evidence that women rely more on intuition; in 12 of 32 studies, women favoured data-driven approaches, while men leaned more on intuition. The remaining studies showed no significant gender differences (Caprino, 2016).

Another study by Muyinudeen and Elsadig (2008) in Malaysia found that male managers were more directive, strategic, and risk-taking, while female managers favoured democratic, participative, and consensus-driven decision-making. Malaysian male entrepreneurs also showed higher risk tolerance than females. The 2009 McKinsey Report (McKinsey & Company, 2010) highlighted women's people-oriented leadership style, characterized by role modelling and decisiveness. Similarly, Zenger and Folkman (2012) found women scored higher in competencies like initiative, honesty, self-development, and results orientation.

Minasyan and Tovmasyan (2020) found that women tend to make decisions in groups, while men often decide alone. Men's decision-making attributes include analytical thinking, confidence, and competitiveness, whereas women are more inclined towards intuitive thinking, consulting, and interpersonal sensitivity. Women in leadership face challenges like discrimination, lack of obedience, and stereotypes that hinder their career advancement, such as the belief that women should prioritize home life or cannot succeed without a man. These stereotypes contribute to barriers to women's professional growth (Minasyan and Tovmasyan, 2020).

Gorman (2005) examined gender disparities in hiring at U.S. law firms, finding that gender-stereotypical traits in hiring criteria and the gender of decision-makers influenced hiring outcomes. When masculine traits were emphasized, fewer women were hired, while feminine traits increased female representation, especially in entry-level roles (Gorman, 2005, pp. 720–722). Lateral hires were less affected, likely due to their greater responsibilities. Female hiring partners hired more women when women were underrepresented among partners, but this effect declined as gender balance improved (Gorman, 2005, pp. 722–723). These patterns reflect how gender stereotypes and in-group preferences shape perceptions of candidate fit. Kanter (1993) supports this, showing that underrepresentation reinforces traditional gender roles in male-dominated settings.

Levin et al. (2005) showed that both female and male participants in hiring and firing decisions were more likely to hire candidates of their own sex, a finding consistent with Gorman (2005) and Bosak and Scezsny (2011). Gender bias was observed mainly in the final decision-making stage. In contrast, Petersen et al. (2000) argued that gender does not influence hiring decisions, suggesting that age and education account for all gender differences. Similarly, Marsden et al. (1993) found no significant gender differences in organizational commitment.

Janis and Mann (1977) identified decisional conflict as a key source of stress that can impair decision quality. This stress typically stems from two sources: the risk of personal, material, or social loss, and the fear of damaging one's self-esteem or reputation. The MDMQ, grounded in decisional conflict theory (Mann et al., 1997), includes two parts: MDMQ I assesses self-esteem, while MDMQ II evaluates four decision-coping patterns (Vigilance, Hypervigilance, Buck-Passing, and Procrastination). These patterns reflect different ways individuals manage decision-related stress, with each decision-maker relying on all patterns to varying degrees depending on gender and factors (Janis & Mann, 1977; Mann et al., 1997).

Related to existing research about gender differences in self-esteem and decision-coping patterns measured by MDMQ, Kling, Hyde, Showers, and Buswell (1999) conducted two studies on global self-esteem and found a slight difference in favour of men. Bleidorn et al. (2015) found men consistently report higher self-esteem than women across all ages. Gentile et al. (2009) found men scored higher in athleticism, self-satisfaction, and appearance, while women scored higher in moral-ethical and behavioural conduct self-esteem, with no differences in academic, family, or social domains. Schwalbe and Staples (1991) found that both genders rely most on reflected appraisals for self-esteem, but men prioritize social comparisons, whereas women place greater value on feedback from others.

According to previous studies, some gender differences can be expected in the decision-coping patterns in the MDMQ. Laroche et al. (2000) found that men tend to be mission- and task-oriented when seeking in-store information, while women are more discovery-oriented shoppers. As such, females may rely more on vigilant decision-coping patterns than non-vigilant ones. Bouckenooghe et al. (2007) showed that women tend to rely less on procrastination compared to men. Yan et al. (2018) found that women are more likely to rely on hypervigilance and buck-passing.

Lizárraga et al. (2007) found women are more influenced by the environment and concerned about decision consequences, while men are goal-oriented, under pressure, and more motivated to decide. Delaney, Strough, Parker, and Bruin (2015) suggested men often use an affective decisional style based on emotions, however, Lizárraga et al. (2007) argued that both genders logically evaluate

alternatives. Gorodetzky, Sahakian, Robbins, and Ersche (2011) found no significant gender differences in decision-making, and Filipe et al. (2020) showed women scored higher in hypervigilance, in line with the findings of Lizárraga et al. (2007).

2.2 Gender differences in group decision-making in business and organizations

Although most research on gender differences in decision-making focuses on individuals, decisions in modern economies often occur in teams, such as in business partnerships, boards, and academic research teams. This makes it difficult to extrapolate individual-level findings to group dynamics. Apesteguia et al. (2012) studied the effect of gender composition in teams on economic performance. Croson and Gneezy (2009) found that women tend to be more risk-averse and have more situationally specific social preferences, while also being more averse to competition. Women are generally more focused on promoting inclusiveness and maintaining conversations (Van Vugt, Cremer & Janssen, 2007). Some findings may reflect women distancing themselves from traditionally masculine values (Bosson & Michniewicz, 2013; Nikolova & Lamberton, 2016).

In an online business game, Apesteguia et al. (2012) found that all-female teams performed poorly, particularly in R&D investment and pricing strategies. The highest-performing team included two men and one woman. Women-led teams also allocated more resources toward social sustainability initiatives. Dufwenberg and Muren (2006) showed that female-majority groups tend to be more generous and egalitarian, with the most generous teams being those composed of two men and one woman. Muller-Kahle and Lewellyn (2011) found that gender-diverse boards were less likely to engage in subprime lending, suggesting that diversity leads to more cautious evaluations of risky strategic decisions. Ombaba (2016) found that gender-diverse boards also performed better, as indicated by a positive relationship with firm performance.

Ibanez, Czermak, and Sutter (2009) examined how gender and mild time pressure affect group decision-making. They found that women in all-female groups searched for longer periods and were less likely to reach the optimal stopping point. Interestingly, mixed-gender groups exhibited decision-making behaviours similar to all-male groups, suggesting that women may adapt to male preferences or defer decision-making in these contexts (Ibanez et al., 2009).

2.3 On the importance of gender equality in decision-making

Privileges are often invisible to those who benefit from them, creating challenges in advocating for equal opportunities. For example, a white woman may only identify with her gender, while a Black woman's experience is shaped by both race and gender. This highlights systemic disadvantages that must be addressed for fairness, though those with privilege may find it difficult to recognize (Kimmel, 2015). Women remain underrepresented in leadership roles, with the Global Gender Gap Report 2024 showing only 68.5% of the gap has been closed. At the current pace, gender equality in leadership won't be achieved until 134 years from now, well beyond the 2030 SDG target, underscoring the need for more effective policies (World Economic Forum, 2024).

The positive effects of gender equality in leadership are increasingly recognized. Gender-diverse leadership teams bring diverse perspectives and skills that foster better decision-making, innovation, and business performance. Studies such as those by Nolan, Moran, and Kotschwar (2016) demonstrate that companies with higher female representation, particularly those with at least 30% women in decision-making roles, experience significant increases in profitability. Moreover, gender-diverse teams improve conflict resolution, enhance creativity, and broaden perspectives, which contribute to a better corporate image and business outcomes (Rose, 2007; Van der Walt, Ingley, Shergill & Townsend, 2006).

Despite concerns that gender quotas may harm performance by placing less-qualified women in leadership roles, research suggests otherwise. Gender quotas help mitigate statistical discrimination, allowing a more diverse pool of candidates to compete for top positions. Profeta (2017) argues that such policies increase efficiency and the overall quality within organizations. While some studies suggest women's risk-aversion might negatively im-

pact stock market performance (Ahern & Dittmar, 2012; Matsa & Miller, 2013; Adams & Ragunathan, 2015), others, such as Ferrari et al. (2016), show that gender-diverse leadership improves short-term stock market outcomes, reducing volatility and benefiting businesses and the economy.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a quantitative research design to empirically investigate and address the specified research questions concerning gender differences in decision-making in businesses and organizations. Primary data were collected using the MDMQ, a validated psychometric instrument designed to assess individual decision-making styles (Mann et al., 1997). The quantitative analysis focuses on identifying gender-related patterns in self-esteem and the tendency to rely on four distinct decision coping strategies.

A non-probability sampling method, specifically a mix of convenience and voluntary response sampling, was employed, resulting in a final sample of 133 respondents (McCombes, 2019; Laerd Dissertation, n.d.). The collected data were processed and analysed to identify gender-related patterns in self-esteem and tendencies to rely on each of the four decision-coping patterns. This empirical approach allows for the exploration of nuanced differences in how male and female participants navigate decision-making processes, providing a basis for evaluating the broader implications of gender equality and diversity in business and organizational settings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Simultaneously, a comprehensive review of relevant literature was conducted to develop the theoretical framework and support research questions development, and in line with methodological standards, it is regarded as part of the study's conceptual foundation rather than a qualitative research method (Boote & Beile, 2005).

3.1 Instruments

The MDMQ was used to assess participants' decision-coping patterns. In addition to the original MDMQ, the questionnaire included demographic questions about gender, age, and occupational status, though only gender was used in the analysis. The MDMQ consisted of two parts: MDMQ I was used to measure self-esteem, and MDMQ II to evaluate four decision-coping patterns: Vigilance, Hypervigilance, Buck-Passing, and Procrastination (Janis & Mann, 1977; Mann et al., 1997).

3.2 Sample

The MDMQ (Mann et al., 1997) was administered online to investigate potential gender differences in self-esteem and decision-making coping styles. The survey link was distributed through various social media platforms and shared via student societies affiliated with the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana. The target population included both current students and recent graduates from the faculty. Data collection was conducted over a two-week period, from July 7 to July 21, 2020.

A total of 133 individuals completed the survey, with 8 excluded as age, resulting in a final sample of 125 participants (69 females, 56 males) aged 20–30 ($M = 24.77$, $SD = 2.35$). The sample included 57 students, 17 job seekers, and 51 employed individuals. Ensuring homogeneity in terms of age is important to reduce its known influence on decision-making (Löckenhoff, 2011; Delaney et al., 2015; Mann et al., 1989; Blanchard-Fields et al., 2004; Bouckenooghe et al., 2007; Kornilova et al., 2018; Glen, 2020). Nonetheless, given the complexity of decision-making, other influencing factors may not have been fully controlled (Soane & Nicholson, 2016).

4 RESULTS

The empirical analysis addresses the first research question on gender differences in individual decision-making. It examines which gender reports higher self-esteem and greater reliance on each of Janis and Mann's (1977) four decision-coping patterns. As decisional conflict theory links decision-related stress to decision quality, the findings offer insight into how men and women differ in coping with the stress inherent in decision-making.

One thing should be noted before analysing the results. When analysing gender differences in decision-making styles, we are looking at tendencies, not absolutes (Benko and Pelster, 2013). Table 1

below shows the mean scores of females, males, and the total sample on the MDMQ. On average, women exhibited lower self-esteem (8.32) compared to men (9.41).

To statistically assess gender differences in self-esteem, both female (n=69) and male (n=56) sample distributions were first compared. Since almost all the most popular parametric tests rely on the assumption of a certain kind of distribution of data (usually normal distribution), first the distribution of data in the sample was analysed. Both female (n=69) and male (n=56) samples exhibited non-normal distributions, requiring the use of non-parametric tests (XLSTAT, 2020b; Zaiontz, 2020).

To assess gender differences in self-esteem, the Mann-Whitney U test was employed, suitable for comparing two independent groups when the dependent variable is ordinal or continuous and data are not normally distributed (Formplus, n.d.; Laerd Statistics, n.d.b). Prior to applying this test, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov two-sample test was conducted to determine if the distributions of self-esteem scores for females and males were identical (Sridharan, 2015). This non-parametric test evaluates the null hypothesis that two samples have the same distribution, making it appropriate for comparing distributions without assuming normality (Laerd Statistics, n.d.a). Visual representations of the distributions suggest that both distributions are skewed to the right. The Two-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov (two-tailed) test at a 5% significance level in Excel (using XLSTAT) was conducted.

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test results indicate a significant difference between the self-esteem distributions of the female and male sample. The computed D statistic and corresponding p-value suggest that the distributions are not identical. Given that the p-value is below the 0.05 significance level

Table 1: Mean scores and standard deviation of females, males, and total sample on MDMQ

	Female	Male	Overall
Scale (items)	n = 69	n = 56	N = 125
Self-esteem	8,32	9,46	8,83
(6 items)	(2,28)	(1,87)	(2,18)
Vigilance	10,07	9,48	9,81
(6 items)	(2,21)	(2,14)	(2,19)
Hypervigilance	4,51	3,41	4,02
(5 items)	(2,36)	(2,51)	(2,48)
Buck-passing	4,61	3,48	4,10
(6 items)	(2,66)	(2,80)	(2,77)
Procrastination	3,71	3,21	3,49
(5 items)	(2,25)	(2,45)	(2,34)

Table 2: Summary statistics of female and male self-esteem sample

Variable	Observations	Obs. with missing data	Obs. without missing data	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation
Female	69	0	69	2,000	12,000	8,319	2,285
Male	56	0	56	4,000	12,000	9,464	1,868

(alpha = 0.05), the null hypothesis is rejected, concluding that the distributions of the two samples are significantly different (XLSTAT, 2020a).

Therefore, running the Mann-Whitney U test to determine whether the two groups' medians are different would not be appropriate, given the differences in the distributions of the two samples. However, the Mann–Whitney U test was employed to compare the mean ranks of the two groups (Laerd Statistics, n.d.; McDonald, 2014). The key point about mean ranks is that the group with the lowest mean rank contains the highest number of lower scores, while the group with the highest mean rank contains the greatest number of higher scores (Field, 2000). The Mann–Whitney U test was conducted at a 5% significance level. Given that the computed p-value was below the significance level (alpha = 0.05), the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative hypothesis accepted, indicating that the mean ranks of the two groups differ, suggesting gender differences in self-esteem levels as measured by the MDMQ I.

Due to unequal variances between the female and male groups, interpreting the Mann–Whitney U test results requires caution. While the test does not assume equal variances, it may not accurately detect differences in distributions when variances differ significantly. In such cases, alternative tests are recommended for comparing variances, however many of these tests are highly sensitive to non-normal distributions, making them less frequently used. Levene's test is known to be less sensitive to departures from normal distributions than the Bartlett test. Unfortunately, Levene's test requires that the test variable be continuous rather than ordinal or nominal, which is not the case in our study. Therefore, findings from the Mann–Whitney U test should be considered with this limitation in mind (Laerd, n.d.a; SPSS Tutorials, 2020; Statistics Solutions, 2020; McDonald, 2014).

The same procedure was applied to test for gender differences in the four decision-coping patterns. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test indicated that the female and male vigilance samples follow the same distribution. The Mann-Whitney U test revealed no differences in the medians between the female and male vigilance samples, meaning there are no gender differences in the tendency to rely on vigilance as a decision-coping pattern. For hypervigilance, the Mann-Whitney U test showed that the mean ranks in the female and male samples are different, indicating that there are gender differences in the tendency to rely on hypervigilance. Regarding buck-passing, the Mann-Whitney U test suggested gender differences in the tendency to rely on buck-passing. For procrastination, the Mann-Whitney U test indicated no gender differences in the tendency to resort to procrastination.

Related to RQ1, the results show that women scored higher on all four decision-coping styles, especially vigilance, indicating clear gender-based differences in individual decision-making styles. Regarding RQ2, although group decision-making was not directly measured here, the complementary strengths observed between genders at the individual level suggest mixed-gender groups could benefit from diverse approaches. For RQ3, the differences in self-esteem and coping patterns highlight the importance of balanced gender representation, as diverse decision-making approaches can improve inclusivity and effectiveness in organizational decision-making.

The results confirm H1. The results show clear gender differences: women have lower self-esteem and higher use of all four decision-coping styles than men. However, the findings do not indicate that either gender's decision-making style is superior. Instead, they reflect different but equally valid ways of coping with decisions in organizational settings. These differences highlight the importance of recognizing diverse decision-making approaches rather than judging effectiveness based on gender. Understanding these variations can help organizations support more inclusive and adaptive decision environments.

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study investigates the relationship between gender and decision-making in business and organizational settings, advancing that neither gender is inherently superior in decision-making; rather, men and women approach decisions differently, with complementary outcomes. These differences should not be viewed as hierarchical but as indicative of various perspectives that can improve decision-making processes.

Women showed higher mean scores than men on all four decision-coping patterns. Interestingly, they relied more on vigilance, the only pattern identified by Mann et al. (1997) as enabling rational and sound decision-making. This indicates that, as decision-makers, women more frequently than men clarify objectives, generate alternative options, thoroughly seek relevant information, and rationally evaluate this information before making the final decision. Additionally, women appear to be more aware of risks, more optimistic about finding better solutions, and more confident that adequate time exists to make thoughtful decisions. These findings align with Laroche et al. (2000), who similarly found that women tend to rely more on vigilant rather than non-vigilant decision-making styles.

Interestingly, this rational and structured approach persists even though women reported lower levels of self-esteem compared to men (8.32 vs. 9.46). This difference aligns with findings from Kling et al. (1999) and Bleidorn et al. (2015), who both propose that men generally have higher self-esteem than women. However, lower self-esteem does not appear to hinder women's decision-making—just the opposite, it could even enhance their vigilance. However, men's higher self-esteem may contribute to overconfidence, potentially leading to less thorough and more impulsive decisions. Since self-esteem is a perception rather than an objective measure of competence, it may not always lead to better decision-making performance (Baumeister et al., 2003).

Regarding other decision-coping patterns, women as well exhibited higher levels of hypervigilance and buck-passing compared to men, which is in line with findings by Yan et al. (2018). They additionally scored higher on procrastination, which contrasts with Bouckenooghe et al. (2007), who suggested women are generally less prone to procrastination. These inconsistencies underscore the need for further investigation, especially considering this study used non-probability sampling, which limits generalizability.

The main message is that even though there exist gender-based differences in decision-making styles within business and organizational settings, this does not imply inherent superiority or greater worth of either gender. Gender-related differences in decision-coping styles should be seen not as weaknesses but as diverse strengths. Men and women bring complementary traits to the decision-making process—traits that, when integrated, can lead to more balanced, informed, and effective organizational outcomes (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

5.1 Theoretical contributions

This study contributes to the growing body of literature exploring gender differences in decision-making by integrating findings from decisional conflict theory (Janis & Mann, 1977) and an extensive literature review of studies on gender differences in decision-making in business and organizational settings. Using the MDMQ, gender differences in self-esteem and decision-coping patterns—vigilance, hypervigilance, buck-passing, and procrastination—were explored. Women scored significantly lower in self-esteem compared to men (8.32 vs. 9.46), yet they scored higher on all four decision-coping patterns. Interestingly, both genders scored highest on vigilance, the only rational and sound decision-making strategy, and lowest on procrastination, indicating a shared tendency to avoid decision delay (Mann et al., 1997, p. 14).

Importantly, women were found to rely more on vigilance than men. Female decision-makers demonstrated a stronger inclination to clarify goals, generate alternatives, systematically evaluate information, and analyse options rationally. They were also more aware of associated risks and more hopeful about identifying better solutions (Mann et al., 1997, p. 2). This finding significantly extends theoretical work on cognitive gender differences by showing that lower self-esteem did not compromise decision quality. In fact, despite their lower self-evaluations, women appeared to make more rational decisions, supporting Baumeister et al.'s (2003) claim that self-esteem reflects perceived attractiveness or confidence, not cognitive ability or competence.

While both genders employed rational decision strategies, women reported more frequent reliance on hypervigilance and buck-passing, which reflects decision-making under pressure and a reluctance to take responsibility, respectively. These findings are consistent with those of Yan et al. (2018). However,

the results diverge from Bouckenooghe et al. (2007), who found that men were more likely to procrastinate, whereas this study suggests that women may in fact score higher on procrastination. This difference could be the result of variations in sample characteristics, measurement methods, or context. Moreover, evolving social roles and varying psychological factors related to procrastination might explain these contrasting findings.

The research also underscores the complexity of isolating gender as a sole predictor of decision-making. Individual behaviour in the business and organizational context appears to be shaped by a reciprocal interaction between the person, the environment, and behavioural patterns. As such, it was confirmed that women and men differ in decision-making, but not in a way that favours one gender over the other. This supports a more nuanced and multi-causal view of behaviour, aligned with Bandura's (1999) triadic reciprocal determinism.

5.2 Practical implications

The findings of this study hold several implications for practice in the business and organizational context, particularly in leadership development, diversity strategy, and organizational culture. The observation that women, despite having lower self-esteem, demonstrate more vigilant and rational decision-making patterns than men, challenges common organizational assumptions equating confidence with competence. It suggests that hiring, promotion, and leadership evaluations should rely less on self-reported confidence and more on observable decision competence (Baumeister et al., 2003). Recognizing vigilance in decision-making could lead to more effective leadership selection, allowing for better decision quality in high-stakes business settings. Recent studies emphasize the importance of broadening leadership evaluations beyond confidence, noting that leadership effectiveness often transcends outward self-assurance (Buljan Šiber et al., 2023).

Second, women's higher scores on vigilance imply that they are more inclined to engage in thoughtful, structured, and informed decision-making. This pattern should be recognized as a strength in leadership pipelines and in critical business functions such as strategic planning, risk management, and problem-solving. Emphasizing vigilance in training programs could improve decision-making outcomes across genders, ultimately benefiting the organization's performance. A similar approach has been found to improve the decision-making of female leaders, demonstrating the power of strategic thinking and analysis. Recognizing this decision-making style can also foster a more inclusive approach to leadership that values thorough, reasoned analysis rather than fast, confident decisions that may be based on assumptions or incomplete data (Inostroza et al., 2023).

At the same time, higher reliance on hypervigilance and buck-passing among women suggests that psychological safety and accountability structures in organizations need reform. Women may defer decisions or over-analyse due to organizational cultures that penalize mistakes more harshly among female professionals. As such, fostering inclusive environments that encourage calculated risk-taking, collaboration, and ownership of decisions is essential to enhancing decision-making effectiveness in business environments (Yan et al., 2018). Recent studies emphasize how organizations can mitigate these biases by offering targeted leadership training and promoting environments of psychological safety. This could create an organizational culture where women feel empowered to make decisions without fear of overcriticism or failure (Sugathan & Kumar, 2024).

Third, while both genders scored similarly on procrastination and vigilance, women's elevated scores across all four coping strategies hint at greater engagement and sensitivity to decision environments, which may stem from navigating more complex socio-professional expectations. This deeper involvement should not be misread as indecisiveness but instead as contextual responsiveness, which can be highly valuable in organizational decision-making processes where multiple variables need to be weighed (Bouckenooghe et al., 2007). Additionally, research by Ifcher and Zarghamee (2023) shows how these coping mechanisms can sometimes close the gender gap when decision-making for others is considered, offering more balanced outcomes in competitive settings. The nuanced approach that women often take when making decisions could ultimately foster better organizational outcomes by promoting thorough, context-sensitive decision-making (Ifcher and Zarghamee, 2023).

In the business and organizational context, where decisions involve multiple stakeholders and shifting interpersonal dynamics, understanding gendered decision patterns becomes especially relevant. The observed ambiguity in gender differences highlights the need for leadership development programs to consider individual behavioural dynamics rather than relying solely on demographic predictors. Organizations should embrace gender equality as a strategic asset, cultivating decision-making environments where different styles are encouraged, integrated, and rewarded (Catalyst, 2020; Ely & Thomas, 2001). Research by Capraro (2019) further supports the idea that addressing gender differences in decision-making, especially in equity-efficiency trade-offs, can benefit organizations by improving collaborative decision-making processes. Gender equality in leadership not only enhances decision quality but also drives innovation and adaptability, which are crucial in today's fast-paced business environments (Capraro, 2019).

5.3 Limitations and future research

The non-probability sampling method used in the study has the disadvantage of a higher likelihood of sampling bias, meaning the findings should not be considered as valid statistical inferences about the entire population. Generally, the larger the sample size, the more accurately we can make inferences about the broader population. With a sample size of 125, it is not large enough to make statistically valid inferences about the entire population. Moreover, since convenience sampling is based on selecting individuals who are easiest for the researcher to access, the sample is unlikely to be representative of the entire population. As a result, the sample does not represent the whole population (Scribbr, 2023).

Voluntary response sampling is based on ease of access, meaning that statistical inferences about the entire population cannot be made since some individuals are more likely to volunteer than others. It is possible that those with a stronger interest in gender studies or decision-making chose to participate in the survey. Additionally, the online survey format may exclude individuals without internet access or those not using Facebook, further compromising sample representativeness (Bhandari, 2020; Laerd dissertation, n.d.; McCombes, 2019).

Future research should explore the intersection of gender roles and decision-making by applying the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) to assess gender role orientations and the MDMQ to evaluate decision-making styles in businesses and organizations. Integrating social cognitive theory (Bussey & Bandura, 1999) and decisional-conflict theory (Janis & Mann, 1977) may provide deeper insights into how gender influences decision-making processes.

EXTENDED SUMMARY/IZVLEČEK

Učinkovitost dela je v veliki meri odvisna od zaposlenih in njihovih sposobnosti odločanja. Raziskave kažejo, da lahko razlike med spoloma pri odločanju vplivajo na managerske prakse, organizacijsko učinkovitost in celotne rezultate poslovanja. Čeprav imajo ženske in moški enake intelektualne sposobnosti in bi morali biti obravnavani enakovredno, se njihov pristop k odločanju pogosto razlikuje ter ponuja komplementarne prednosti. Te razlike poudarjajo pomen razumevanja slogov odločanja glede na spol kot obogatitve in ne hierarhije ter osvetljujejo, zakaj je doseganje enakosti spolov še vedno ključno. Za optimizacijo odločanja posameznikov in skupin v poslovnem in organizacijskem okolju je bistveno razumeti tako prednosti kot omejitve, povezane z odločanjem posameznega spola. Na podlagi obsežnega pregleda znanstvenih knjig in člankov ter empiričnih podatkov, zbranih z Melbourne Decision Making Questionnaire, ki ga je izpolnilo 133 udeležencev, ta študija najprej analizira in obravnava razlike med spoloma pri individualnem odločanju v poslovnem in organizacijskem kontekstu. Ta analiza predstavlja temelj za proučevanje, kako sestava skupin glede na spol vpliva na skupinsko odločanje, ter poudarja pomen spodbujanja enakosti spolov v procesih organizacijskega odločanja; vprašanje, ki v razvitem svetu postaja vse pomembnejše.

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