



GENDER EQUALITY POLICY COMMUNICATION IN FORMAL WORKPLACES: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF WOMEN WORKERS' EXPERIENCES

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Abstract

Gender equality policies in formal workplaces do not automatically produce substantive equality in everyday organisational practice. Their implementation is shaped not only by the existence of formal rules, but also by how such policies are communicated, interpreted, and connected to employees' workplace experiences. This study examines how women workers experience and interpret the communication of gender equality policies in formal workplace settings. Using a qualitative descriptive-exploratory design, data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews with four women workers from different organisational contexts: industry, government or policy consultancy, banking or finance, and digital technology. The data were analysed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, with attention to dialogic space, employee participation, policy legitimacy, and the internalisation of gender equality values. The findings identify four patterns of policy communication: formal communication, deliberative-participatory communication, compliance-based communication, and digital-participatory communication. Formal and compliance-based communication made policies visible and procedurally clear, but provided limited space for employees to discuss their relevance to everyday work. Deliberative-participatory and digital-participatory communication offered more opportunities for dialogue, reflection, and engagement, allowing employees to connect policy principles with workplace realities. Based on these findings, the study proposes an exploratory model of gender equality policy communication consisting of four interconnected elements: dialogic space, employee participation, policy legitimacy, and the internalisation of gender equality values. The study contributes to discussions on policy communication, organisational culture, and gender equality by showing that gender equality policies become more meaningful when employees are given communicative spaces to understand, question, and interpret them. The findings are exploratory and are not intended to represent all formal workplace contexts.

Keywords: *Gender Equality; Policy Communication; Formal Workplace; Deliberative Communication; Women Workers*

A. Introduction

Gender equality in formal workplaces extends beyond women's numerical representation in the workforce. It encompasses equitable access to career advancement, leadership positions, decision-making processes, and protection from discriminatory

practices. Many organisations have introduced policies promoting equal opportunity and non-discrimination. Despite these developments, women continue to encounter barriers that affect their participation and advancement in professional settings. Nadiah and Khasanah (2026) found that gender bias and discriminatory treatment remain present across various sectors, while Marlina and Jusmiwati (2026) highlighted the continuing influence of structural and cultural constraints on women's employment experiences. These findings suggest that the presence of gender equality policies does not always translate into equality in everyday workplace practices.

The persistence of this issue points to factors that extend beyond policy formulation. Organisational culture, workplace power relations, and communication processes influence how policies are understood and enacted. Acker (1990) argues that organisational structures are not gender neutral, since assumptions about gender are often embedded in job arrangements, workplace hierarchies, and organisational practices. A policy may be formally established, yet its impact depends on how employees interpret its objectives and relevance within their working environment. Lestari et al. (2025) reported that women still face obstacles in accessing strategic professional positions, indicating that workforce participation does not necessarily guarantee equal access to organisational influence. For this reason, the implementation of gender equality policies involves ongoing interaction between organisational regulations and employees' interpretations of those regulations.

Within this context, policy communication becomes an important element of implementation. Communication shapes how organisational values are conveyed, discussed, and understood among employees. This is consistent with internal communication scholarship, which views communication as central to employee engagement, organisational understanding, and the alignment between organisational objectives and employee interpretation (Ruck & Welch, 2012; Welch & Jackson, 2007). Through communication, organisations explain the purpose of a policy, clarify expectations, and connect policy objectives with workplace realities. Dzulkarnain (2026) argues that policy communication contributes to the formation of perceptions regarding social issues. Employees who receive clear explanations and opportunities for discussion are more likely to understand the relevance of a policy to their professional experiences. In contrast, communication that is limited to procedural announcements may encourage employees to view policy as an administrative requirement with little connection to everyday practice. Maretha et al. (2025) identify communication quality as a key factor influencing policy implementation, while Sari and Gunawan (2025) emphasise that shifts in gender perspectives require sustained communication and engagement. These observations indicate that the effectiveness of gender equality policy is closely linked to the quality of communication surrounding it.

Research on gender equality in employment has examined issues such as discrimination, women's representation, employment opportunities, policy implementation, and legal protection for women workers (Lestari et al., 2025; Lispriyanti et al., 2025; Marlina & BJ, 2026; Mayasari et al., 2025). This body of literature has

contributed significantly to understanding the challenges faced by women in workplace settings. However, studies that focus on how gender equality policies are communicated within organisations remain limited. Existing discussions tend to emphasise policy outcomes, legal frameworks, or organisational commitments, while the communicative processes through which employees encounter, interpret, and evaluate these policies receive less attention. This gap is important because diversity and inclusion are not identical; inclusion concerns whether employees experience belonging, voice, and access to participation within organisational life (Roberson, 2006; Shore et al., 2011). As a result, there is still limited understanding of how women workers experience policy communication and how those experiences influence perceptions of participation, legitimacy, and gender equality within the workplace.

This study addresses that gap by examining gender equality policy communication from the perspective of women workers. The analysis focuses on how employees understand and interpret organisational efforts to communicate gender equality policies in their respective workplaces. The study draws on the experiences of four women working in different formal employment contexts: industry, government or policy consultancy, banking or finance, and digital technology. The purpose is not to represent all workplace settings or generate statistical generalisations. Instead, the study adopts an exploratory approach to identify patterns and variations in women's experiences of policy communication across different organisational environments. This focus is also aligned with research showing that diversity-related policies produce stronger organisational meaning when they are connected to learning, participation, and the integration of employees' experiences rather than treated only as formal compliance mechanisms (Ely & Thomas, 2001).

To guide the analysis, this study employs Jürgen Habermas's theory of the public sphere and deliberative communication. Habermas (2004, 2006) conceptualises communication as a process through which individuals develop mutual understanding through dialogue, argumentation, and equal opportunities to participate in discussion. From this perspective, communication plays a central role in the formation of legitimacy because shared understanding emerges through interaction among participants. Held (2023) explains that Habermas's framework emphasises participation, dialogue, and rational exchange in the development of social understanding. This perspective offers a useful lens for examining gender equality policy communication because employees' responses to policy are shaped by the extent to which they can engage with, discuss, and interpret policy within their organisational context.

Drawing on this framework, the study examines several dimensions of deliberative communication, including the availability of dialogic spaces, opportunities for employees to express views, levels of participation, equality of voice, and perceptions of policy legitimacy. The study seeks to answer the following question: How do women workers experience and interpret the communication of gender equality policies in formal workplace settings? To address this question, the analysis explores communication practices encountered by women workers, the extent to which those practices facilitate

dialogue and participation, and the ways in which communication influences employees' understanding of gender equality policy.

B. Methods

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive-exploratory design to examine how women workers experience and interpret the communication of gender equality policies in formal workplace settings (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Sugiyono, 2019). This design was selected because the study aimed to explore participants' perceptions, interpretations, and workplace experiences rather than measure policy effectiveness statistically or produce generalisable findings. The research was conducted online and offline in Indonesia from January to March 2026. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews lasting approximately 45–70 minutes for each participant. The interviews focused on participants' experiences of receiving or engaging with gender equality policy communication, the communication channels used by their organisations, opportunities for dialogue and participation, and their perceptions of how such policies were implemented in everyday workplace practices. The exploratory nature of the study is consistent with its limited but focused empirical basis, namely four women workers from different formal employment contexts.

Table 1. Informants

Informant	Age	Position	Organisational Sector	Length of Employment	Experience Related to Policy
Informant 1 (I1)	28	Human Resources Staff	Industry	≥ 3 years	Socialisation of gender equality and anti-discrimination policies
Informant 2 (I2)	31	Policy Analyst	Government / Policy Consultancy	≥ 5 years	Analysis and implementation of gender equality policies
Informant 3 (I3)	27	Administrative Staff	Banking / Finance	≥ 2 years	Anti-harassment policy and employee protection
Informant 4 (I4)	25	Communication / Public Relations Staff	Technology / Digital Startup	≥ 1 year	Internal campaign on gender equality

Source: Research data, 2026.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their relevance to the focus of the study. The selection criteria included women aged 25–35 years who worked in formal employment and had experience receiving, communicating, analysing, or engaging with policies related to gender equality, anti-discrimination, or employee protection. The variation in organisational sectors was used to obtain a preliminary understanding of different policy communication experiences across workplace contexts. The number of participants was considered appropriate for an exploratory study that prioritised depth of information rather than statistical representation. All participants were identified using codes (I1–I4) to protect their identities and the confidentiality of their workplaces. Before the interviews, participants received information about the purpose of the study, interview procedures, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and the academic use of the data. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. The interviews were recorded with participants' permission, supported by field notes, and transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were checked against the recordings to reduce transcription errors and preserve the meaning of participants' statements.

Data were analysed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2018), which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. The analysis began with open coding to identify statements related to gender equality policy communication, organisational communication practices, employee participation, dialogic space, policy legitimacy, and the internalisation of gender equality values. Similar codes were then grouped into broader thematic categories and compared across informants to identify similarities and differences in their experiences. The analytical process was guided by the deliberative communication framework used in the Introduction, particularly the dimensions of dialogic space, opportunities to express views, participation, equality of voice, and policy legitimacy. Data credibility was strengthened by comparing accounts across participants from different organisational sectors, conducting member checking by returning interview summaries to participants for confirmation, and using peer debriefing to reduce interpretive bias. Given the exploratory design and the limited number of participants, the findings are not intended to represent all formal workplaces, but to provide an initial analytical account of how women workers experience and interpret gender equality policy communication in different organisational contexts.

C. Results and Discussion

1. Patterns of Gender Equality Policy Communication

This section examines how women workers experienced the communication of gender equality policies in their workplaces. The analysis focuses on the ways organisations introduced, explained, and discussed these policies with employees. Although all informants worked in organisations that had some form of gender equality policy, their experiences of policy communication varied considerably. The interviews suggest that differences emerged in the communication processes adopted by organisations, the opportunities available for employee participation, and the extent to

which policy messages were connected to everyday workplace realities. From the interview data, four patterns of policy communication were identified: formal communication, deliberative-participatory communication, compliance-based communication, and digital-participatory communication.

The first pattern was formal communication, as reflected in the experience of Informant 1, who worked in the industrial sector. In this context, gender equality and anti-discrimination policies were communicated through orientation sessions, internal training, company handbooks, and formal administrative procedures. These mechanisms ensured that employees received information about organisational rules and expectations. At the same time, the informant described a communication process that was largely one-directional and focused on policy dissemination. She stated:

“In my workplace, the policy on gender equality is actually quite clearly written in the company regulations. We usually receive an explanation during the orientation session when we first join, and there is also annual training that discusses work ethics, including discrimination. However, I think the communication still feels one-directional, more like an obligation to understand the rules rather than a space for discussion. Sometimes we understand the policy only at the surface level, not yet in terms of how it applies to everyday situations at work.” (Interview, Informant 1, 2026)

The interview suggests that employees were aware of the existence of gender equality policies, yet opportunities to discuss their practical implications were limited. The policy was communicated clearly, but employees were expected to understand and follow it without extensive discussion about its relevance to workplace situations. Habermas argues that mutual understanding develops through communicative interaction in which participants exchange views and engage with different perspectives (Habermas & Burger, 1991; Kaun, 2024). In the experience described by Informant 1, communication functioned primarily as the delivery of organisational information. As a result, employees could recognise the policy while still having limited opportunities to interpret its meaning in relation to their daily work experiences.

The second pattern was deliberative-participatory communication, as shown in the experience of Informant 2, who worked as a policy analyst in a government or policy consultancy context. In this setting, policy communication included discussion forums, workshops, and opportunities for employees to express opinions regarding policy implementation. Employees were encouraged to engage with policy issues through dialogue and collective discussion. The informant explained:

“In my workplace, policy communication does not stop at the delivery of documents or rules. We often hold discussion forums or workshops that address gender equality issues more openly. In those forums, we can share experiences or even criticise the implementation of existing policies. This helps me understand the substance of the policy better because there is space to ask questions and engage in dialogue, rather than just receive information one-sidedly.” (Interview, Informant 2, 2026)

The account highlights the importance of dialogue in shaping employees' understanding of policy. Through workshops and discussion forums, gender equality became a topic that employees could examine collectively and relate to their own experiences. The policy was therefore understood through interaction and reflection, not simply through exposure to organisational documents. Habermas (1991) associates communicative legitimacy with participation in open discussion, while Held (2023) emphasises the role of rational exchange in developing shared understanding. The experience of Informant 2 illustrates how opportunities for discussion can deepen policy comprehension and strengthen employees' sense of involvement in organisational processes.

The third pattern was compliance-based communication, as experienced by Informant 3, who worked in the banking or financial sector. In this organisational context, gender equality, anti-harassment, and employee protection policies were communicated mainly through official emails, online training modules, and mandatory procedures. Employees were required to complete training and acknowledge policy documents as part of organisational compliance requirements. The informant stated:

"In my office, information related to gender equality policy is usually delivered through official emails or mandatory online training modules. We are required to understand and approve the policy as part of company compliance. But honestly, we often focus only on completing the training as a formality. There is not much space to discuss or talk about real experiences that may occur in the workplace."
(Interview, Informant 3, 2026)

This communication pattern emphasised procedural completion and policy acknowledgement. Employees received information and fulfilled organisational requirements, yet discussion about workplace experiences related to gender equality was largely absent. The interview indicates that policy communication was effective in ensuring awareness of formal obligations, although it contributed less to collective reflection on workplace realities. From a deliberative perspective, limited opportunities for discussion reduce employees' involvement in interpreting policy and connecting it to their own experiences. Consequently, policy understanding may remain focused on compliance requirements rather than broader questions of workplace equality. This finding resonates with Dobbin and Kalev's (2016) critique of diversity programmes that rely heavily on mandatory training and compliance mechanisms. Such approaches may increase procedural awareness, but they do not necessarily produce deeper commitment to equality when employees are not meaningfully engaged in the process.

The fourth pattern was digital-participatory communication, as reflected in the experience of Informant 4, who worked in the digital technology sector. In this workplace, gender equality issues were communicated through internal digital platforms, visual campaigns, sharing sessions, and informal communication activities. The informant described these approaches as easier to engage with because they connected policy messages to everyday situations. She stated:

“In my company, gender equality issues are often communicated through creative internal campaigns, such as content on the office communication platform or sharing sessions. The communication feels more relaxed and less rigid, so it is easier for employees to understand and accept. We also often see case examples or real stories that make the issue feel close to everyday life. I think this is more effective than only reading formal policy documents.” (Interview, Informant 4, 2026)

The interview suggests that employees encountered policy messages through formats that were familiar and accessible. Real-life examples and workplace stories helped translate policy principles into situations that employees could recognise in their daily interactions. The significance of this communication pattern lies in the opportunities it created for engagement and reflection. Employees were able to connect organisational values with personal experiences, which contributed to a more meaningful understanding of gender equality issues in the workplace. In this respect, internal communication functioned as an enabling process, allowing employees not only to receive organisational messages but also to participate in making those messages relevant to workplace experience (Mazzei, 2014).

The findings demonstrate that gender equality policy communication took different forms across organisational settings. Some organisations relied primarily on formal dissemination and compliance procedures, while others incorporated discussion, participation, and experience-sharing into the communication process. These differences influenced how employees understood and interpreted policy messages. The interviews indicate that women workers developed their understanding of gender equality policies through the communication environments created by their organisations. Opportunities for dialogue, reflection, and engagement appeared to play an important role in shaping how policy was understood and connected to workplace experience.

2. Dialogic Space, Participation, and the Internalisation of Gender Equality Values

The interviews show that employees’ understanding of gender equality policy was shaped by the extent to which organisations provided space for dialogue and participation. The presence of a formal policy was not sufficient to ensure that gender equality values were understood or internalised in everyday work. What mattered was how employees encountered the policy, whether they could discuss its meaning, and whether the communication process allowed them to relate policy principles to their own workplace experiences. Across the four interviews, policies were more likely to be perceived as meaningful when communication involved discussion, reflection, and opportunities for employees to express their views.

Informant 1’s experience illustrates the limits of policy communication that remains focused on formal dissemination. Although the organisation had written policies on gender equality and anti-discrimination, she still observed workplace practices that reflected gendered assumptions. She explained:

“In terms of rules, the company has actually regulated gender equality quite clearly. But in practice, I still feel that there are differences in treatment, especially in the distribution of tasks or in the way supervisors interact. For example, women are often considered less suitable for certain jobs that are seen as heavier or more technical. These things may not be written, but they are felt in everyday work. So, in my opinion, the policy exists, but it has not fully lived within the company’s work culture.” (Interview, Informant 1, 2026)

This statement shows a gap between formal policy and workplace culture. The policy was known, but its values were not always reflected in daily interactions. In this case, the lack of dialogic space limited employees’ opportunity to question gendered assumptions that continued to shape task allocation and workplace relations. Mayasari and Dama (2025) argue that gender inequality often appears through social practices and work relations that are not always explicitly stated in formal organisational rules. Informant 1’s experience supports this point. The issue was not the absence of policy, but the limited process through which employees could discuss how the policy should transform everyday practices.

A different experience was described by Informant 2. In her workplace, communication about gender equality policy involved forums that allowed employees to express opinions, ask questions, and evaluate implementation. She stated:

“During my work, I see that gender equality issues receive quite serious attention in my workplace. We do not only know the policy, but are also invited to understand and criticise it. Personally, I feel more appreciated because there is space to express opinions, even on sensitive issues such as discrimination or injustice. This makes me feel that the policy is not merely a formality, but is genuinely being pursued in practice.” (Interview, Informant 2, 2026)

The experience of Informant 2 indicates that participation contributed to a stronger perception of policy legitimacy. Employees were not positioned only as recipients of organisational rules, but as participants who could reflect on and respond to the policy. This helped the policy appear less as an imposed requirement and more as a shared organisational concern. Habermas (1991) argues that legitimacy is strengthened when individuals are able to participate in communicative processes that allow argumentation and mutual understanding. In this case, the forum created a communicative environment in which gender equality policy could be interpreted collectively. Participation therefore became an important condition for employees to see the policy as relevant and credible.

Informant 3’s experience shows that policy legitimacy may remain limited when communication is dominated by administrative compliance. The organisation had clear policies on anti-harassment and employee protection, but the communication process was mainly conducted through documents, emails, and mandatory online training. She explained:

“In my workplace, policies related to gender equality are already available and quite complete. We know that there are rules on anti-harassment and employee protection. But in everyday work, the policy feels like something that exists in documents, not something that is really discussed or used as a shared reflection.

Personally, I feel safe, but not everyone necessarily has the same experience. So sometimes it feels as if the policy is more of a formality.” (Interview, Informant 3, 2026)

This account suggests that policy awareness does not automatically lead to internalisation. Employees may know that protective rules exist, yet the policy may remain distant from daily work if it is not discussed as part of organisational culture. The informant’s statement that the policy “exists in documents” is important because it shows how formal communication can produce procedural knowledge without creating a shared reflective space. In this context, compliance ensured that employees were informed, but it did not necessarily encourage collective engagement with gender equality as a workplace value.

Informant 4 described a more open communication environment. In her workplace, gender equality was discussed through internal forums, informal communication, and digital platforms. These communication practices helped employees feel more comfortable in discussing sensitive issues. She stated:

“In my opinion, in the company where I work, gender equality issues are often discussed and are not considered sensitive in a negative way. We can talk about them in relaxed forums or other internal activities. I feel more comfortable because there is no restriction on expressing opinions. Even when there is an issue or an unpleasant experience, it can usually be discussed directly. This makes me feel that the workplace environment supports equality, although of course there are still things that can be improved.” (Interview, Informant 4, 2026)

This experience shows how openness in communication can help employees connect gender equality policy with everyday organisational life. The informant did not describe policy merely as a written rule, but as an issue that could be discussed when relevant situations emerged. This is important because internalisation depends not only on knowing the content of a policy, but also on recognising its relevance in concrete workplace interactions. The ability to discuss uncomfortable experiences directly suggests that communication can function as a mechanism for making policy values more present in organisational practice. This is consistent with Nishii’s (2013) concept of climate for inclusion, which emphasises the reduction of relational bias, equitable access to resources, and opportunities for members of different identity groups to build meaningful cross-cutting ties. In the present study, inclusive communication did not remove all workplace inequalities, but it created better conditions for employees to interpret equality policy as relevant to everyday work.

Across the four interviews, dialogic space and participation appeared to influence how employees interpreted the legitimacy of gender equality policy. Where communication was formal or compliance-based, employees recognised the existence of policy but tended to experience it as distant from everyday practice. Where communication allowed discussion and participation, employees were more likely to perceive the policy as meaningful and connected to workplace realities. This does not mean that participatory communication automatically eliminates gender inequality.

Rather, the findings suggest that participation helps create the conditions through which employees can understand, question, and internalise gender equality values.

These findings are consistent with the deliberative framework used in this study. Habermas's concept of communication emphasises that mutual understanding emerges through interaction, not through one-way transmission of information (Habermas & Burger, 1991). In the context of gender equality policy, this means that employees need more than access to documents or formal training. They need communicative spaces where policy can be discussed in relation to their experiences. The interviews therefore suggest that the internalisation of gender equality values is closely linked to three elements: the availability of dialogic space, the degree of employee participation, and the perceived legitimacy of the policy. These elements form the basis for understanding why some policies were experienced as meaningful, while others were perceived primarily as procedural obligations.

3. Compliance, Organisational Culture, and the Limits of Policy Communication

The interviews also reveal that gender equality policy communication faced several limitations. These limitations were not mainly related to the absence of policy, since all informants described some form of organisational rule or initiative concerning gender equality, anti-discrimination, or employee protection. The more pressing issue was how these policies were communicated, interpreted, and connected to workplace culture. In several cases, policy communication created awareness of formal rules but did not fully challenge gendered assumptions, hierarchical communication practices, or the tendency to treat policy as a procedural requirement.

Informant 1's account illustrates how organisational culture can limit the effect of formal policy communication. Although gender equality and anti-discrimination policies were introduced through formal channels, everyday workplace practices still reflected assumptions about gendered suitability for certain tasks. She stated:

“When talking about policy, the company has actually communicated rules on gender equality and anti-discrimination quite clearly. But the challenge lies in how the policy is understood and implemented in practice. Sometimes there is still an assumption that certain jobs are more suitable for men, and this is not always discussed openly. Socialisation exists, but it mostly takes the form of information delivery, not discussion. So, in my opinion, its effectiveness is still not optimal because it has not touched deeper changes in mindset.” (Interview, Informant 1, 2026)

This statement shows that communication through socialisation and formal instruction may not be sufficient when workplace culture continues to reproduce gendered expectations. The informant did not question the existence of policy; instead, she pointed to the limited ability of communication to address assumptions embedded in everyday work relations. Abdi et al. (2025) argue that organisational culture formed over time can influence how employees respond to new policies. Informant 1's experience supports this argument. The policy was available, but the communication process had not

created enough space for employees to discuss the gendered assumptions that shaped work allocation and interaction with supervisors.

A different limitation appeared in Informant 2's experience. Her workplace had more open communication forums, yet policy implementation remained uneven across institutional settings. She explained:

"In my environment, policy communication is actually quite good because there are many discussion forums and coordination among different parties. But problems emerge when the policy has to be implemented in different institutions. Sometimes the interpretation is not the same, so the implementation also varies. This makes the effectiveness of the policy uneven. In my opinion, the biggest challenge lies in synchronisation across institutions, not only in the policy itself." (Interview, Informant 2, 2026)

This account indicates that participatory communication does not automatically guarantee consistency in implementation. Matland's (1995) ambiguity-conflict model helps explain this problem: when policy meanings are interpreted differently across organisational units, implementation may become uneven even when policy objectives appear formally clear. Dialogue may help employees understand and evaluate policy, but coordination is still needed to ensure that policy meanings are not interpreted too differently across units or institutions. Damanik et al. (2025) emphasise that coordination is important for maintaining shared understanding in policy implementation. Informant 2's experience suggests that deliberative communication needs to be accompanied by organisational mechanisms that support consistency. Without such mechanisms, policy may be discussed openly but implemented unevenly.

The limitation of compliance-oriented communication appeared most clearly in Informant 3's experience. In her workplace, policies on anti-discrimination and employee protection were formally clear, but communication remained closely tied to documents, online modules, and mandatory procedures. She stated:

"In my opinion, the company's policy is quite complete and clear, especially regarding anti-discrimination and employee protection. But because it is mostly communicated through documents or formal training, it feels like an obligation. There is not much space to discuss real experiences in the workplace. As a result, the policy does not always feel relevant to daily situations. So, in my view, its effectiveness is still limited to the formal aspect." (Interview, Informant 3, 2026)

This experience shows how compliance-based communication may produce procedural clarity while leaving limited room for reflection. Employees know that rules exist and understand what must be completed administratively, but policy communication does not necessarily encourage discussion of gendered experiences or workplace concerns. Setiawan et al. (2025) note that overly formal policy communication can lead to administrative compliance without deeper shifts in understanding. In this case, policy communication supported organisational accountability, but it remained less effective in making gender equality a subject of shared reflection among employees.

Informant 4's experience provides a contrasting case, but it also shows that participatory and digital communication still requires organisational support. In her

workplace, gender equality issues were communicated through internal campaigns, digital platforms, and informal forums. These practices made the issue more accessible and easier to discuss. However, the informant also acknowledged that there were still aspects that needed improvement. This suggests that open communication can reduce some barriers, but it cannot replace formal organisational commitment, clear procedures, and consistent follow-up. Digital-participatory communication may create engagement, but it needs institutional support to ensure that discussion is translated into organisational practice.

These findings show that the limits of gender equality policy communication are shaped by the relationship between communication practices and organisational culture. Formal and compliance-based communication can make policy visible, but they may not be sufficient to transform assumptions that are reproduced in everyday work. Participatory communication can strengthen understanding and legitimacy, but it still requires coordination and organisational consistency. The interviews therefore suggest that policy communication is most effective when it does not stop at dissemination or symbolic engagement, but becomes part of a broader organisational effort to connect rules, dialogue, and workplace practice.

The discussion also reinforces the need to treat the findings as exploratory. Because the study is based on four informants from different organisational settings, the findings do not establish a general typology of all gender equality policy communication in formal workplaces. Instead, they identify several recurring issues that emerged from women workers' experiences: the persistence of gendered assumptions, the limits of one-way communication, the procedural orientation of compliance systems, and the need for coordination in participatory policy communication. These issues are important because they explain why the existence of gender equality policy does not always lead to the internalisation of gender equality values in everyday organisational life.

4. An Exploratory Model of Gender Equality Policy Communication

Based on the four interviews, this study proposes an exploratory model of gender equality policy communication built around four interconnected elements: dialogic space, employee participation, policy legitimacy, and the internalisation of gender equality values. The model is not intended as a general framework for all formal workplaces. Rather, it is derived from the patterns that appeared in the informants' accounts and should be understood as an initial analytical formulation that requires further testing in broader organisational contexts.

The first element is dialogic space. The interviews show that employees' understanding of gender equality policy was shaped by whether the organisation provided opportunities to discuss policy beyond formal dissemination. In workplaces where communication was limited to orientation, handbooks, emails, or mandatory online training, employees tended to recognise the policy as an organisational rule but had fewer opportunities to relate it to daily work situations. In contrast, discussion forums, workshops, sharing sessions, and internal campaigns allowed employees to engage with

policy in a more reflective way. Dialogic space therefore functioned as the initial condition that enabled policy to be interpreted rather than merely received.

The second element is employee participation. Dialogue became more meaningful when employees were not only informed about policy but also allowed to express views, raise questions, share experiences, and respond to the way policy was implemented. This element was most visible in the experiences of Informant 2 and Informant 4, who described communication processes that gave employees room to participate. Their accounts suggest that participation helped employees understand policy as part of organisational life, not only as a formal document. In this sense, participation connected policy communication with employees' lived experiences. This connection is central to inclusion scholarship, which emphasises that employees need both belonging and opportunities to contribute distinctive perspectives within organisational settings (Shore et al., 2011).

The third element is policy legitimacy. The interviews indicate that employees were more likely to perceive gender equality policy as credible when they felt included in the communication process. Policy legitimacy did not emerge only from organisational authority or the existence of written rules. It was also shaped by whether employees felt that their experiences and concerns could be heard. Where communication remained one-directional or compliance-based, policy tended to be perceived as more formal and procedural. Where employees were invited to discuss and interpret policy, it was more likely to be viewed as a meaningful organisational commitment.

The fourth element is the internalisation of gender equality values. Internalisation refers to the process through which employees connect policy principles with workplace practices and everyday interactions. The interviews suggest that internalisation was limited when policy was communicated mainly as an obligation. Employees could know the rules without necessarily seeing gender equality reflected in work allocation, supervisor interaction, or organisational culture. By contrast, communication that involved dialogue and participation made it easier for employees to understand gender equality as a value relevant to their daily work. This does not mean that internalisation was complete or that participatory communication removed all forms of inequality. It indicates that communication created better conditions for employees to interpret and adopt the values embedded in policy.

The relationship among these four elements can be understood as a sequential but flexible process. Dialogic space creates opportunities for participation. Participation strengthens employees' perception of policy legitimacy. Legitimacy then supports the internalisation of gender equality values in workplace life. However, this process is not automatic. Organisational culture, hierarchical communication, administrative compliance, and uneven coordination may interrupt or weaken the relationship among these elements. For this reason, the model should be read as an exploratory explanation of how policy communication may shape employees' understanding of gender equality, rather than as a causal model.

The proposed model contributes to the discussion of gender equality policy by shifting attention from policy existence to policy communication. The findings suggest that policies become meaningful not only because they are formally adopted, but because they are communicated through processes that allow employees to understand, question, and relate them to workplace realities. This is particularly important in organisations where gender equality policies may already exist but are experienced by employees as distant from daily practice. The model therefore highlights the communicative conditions that can support the movement from policy awareness to policy interpretation, legitimacy, and value internalisation.

This exploratory model also clarifies the main finding of the study. Gender equality policy communication is not a single organisational act, but an ongoing process through which policy is introduced, discussed, interpreted, and connected to workplace culture. The experiences of the four informants show that communication practices shape how women workers understand and evaluate gender equality policy. Formal and compliance-based communication may ensure policy visibility, while deliberative and digital-participatory communication may provide stronger conditions for engagement and meaning-making. These findings answer the research question by showing that women workers' experiences of policy communication are shaped by the communicative spaces available to them and by the degree to which organisations allow participation in interpreting gender equality policy.

D. Conclusion

This study examined how women workers experienced and interpreted the communication of gender equality policies in formal workplace settings. Based on interviews with four women from the industrial, government or policy consultancy, banking or finance, and digital technology sectors, the study found that gender equality policy communication varied across organisational contexts. Four patterns were identified: formal communication, deliberative-participatory communication, compliance-based communication, and digital-participatory communication. Formal and compliance-based communication made policies visible and procedurally clear, but often provided limited space for employees to discuss how gender equality was experienced in everyday work. Deliberative-participatory and digital-participatory communication, by contrast, offered more opportunities for dialogue, reflection, and employee engagement.

The findings suggest that gender equality policies become more meaningful when communication goes beyond policy dissemination and administrative compliance. Dialogic space, employee participation, and perceived policy legitimacy shaped the extent to which workers could connect policy principles with workplace realities. Based on these findings, the study proposes an exploratory model of gender equality policy communication consisting of four interconnected elements: dialogic space, employee participation, policy legitimacy, and the internalisation of gender equality values. This model indicates that policy communication is not merely a technical process of delivering

organisational rules, but a social process through which employees interpret, evaluate, and relate policy to their lived workplace experiences.

This study is limited by its small number of informants and its exploratory design. The findings are therefore not intended to represent all formal workplaces or establish a general model of gender equality policy communication. Further research should involve a larger number of participants, more diverse organisational settings, and additional data sources such as policy documents, human resource personnel, managers, and workplace observations. Such research would help test and refine the exploratory model proposed in this study and provide a stronger empirical basis for understanding how communication practices influence the implementation of gender equality policies in organisational life.

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