

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN WOMEN IN MANAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

This review article, in the style of an essay, in the area of women in management focuses on the role of gender in the context of organisational work. Gender is seen as a phenomenon more than mere sex-based differences and incorporates social as well as cultural attributes of human beings. Women in the work context are increasingly being accepted as a part of the workforce though such acceptance has come after a long struggle. Women in management are seen as contributors to better organisational performance and thus an inclusive approach to women is perceived not just as a matter of social justice but of the business case of profitability too. Gender diversity is accepted as an integral part of the worldwide movement to enhance diversity within organisations. Women as managers in organisations are generally accepted but they face myriad obstacles and challenges in the form of gender discrimination. Measures such as the number of women in higher levels of management or being represented on corporate boards may be an indicator of their acceptance as equal to men thus leading to gender equality which is seen more in terms of equity rather than just in the strength of numbers. As a research issue, women as managers present a special situation where they face unique situations and challenges that need special strategies to be dealt with. Overall, the increasing participation in workforce augurs well not only for the society but for organisations that are willing to accept and nurture them.

INTRODUCTION

Gender is an inevitable part of managing organizations. In organisations where men and women work together the position of women in comparison with men is an issue that is the subject matter of the area of gender in management. The natural differences between men and women lead to several repercussions within organizations that are the focus of studies in gender in managing. That gender is an imperative can be seen in several observations such as the differences in preferred occupation by men and women, the relative differences in terms of how power and influence is exercised in organisations or how discrimination occurs with women facing negative consequences in terms of pay disparities or promotional opportunities. All these and many more are the typical issues in gender in managing organisations.

GENDERED MANAGEMENT

When gender is referred to, it is usual to think of 'men and women' and 'relations between them'; these are certainly part of gender, but only a part. (Broadbridge & Hearn, 2008) The differences between

men and women have more to do with the biological sexual differences among them; gender has wider connotations of the social, cultural, political and historical differences. Oakley (1972) was among the pioneering scholars to distinguish 'sex' as biological sex differences from 'gender' as socio-cultural constructions of sex differences.

Sexual differentiation is both visible and as well as latent. Physical differences in men and women are the cause of overt sexual differences. Latent differences are the differences in physiological functions acting differently in men and women. Gender differentiation refers to social processes that create and exaggerate biological differences. (Reskin, 1988) Taken together, sexual and gender differentiation makes it possible to distinguish men and women in readily noticeable ways.

Rather than resorting to a misplaced sense of egalitarianism it should be recognised that indeed men and women are often different, function differently and perform differently both between and among them. Yet such differences do not mean that one is better or worse than the other or that one should be rewarded and the

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other not. (Chapman-Harris, 2013) Yet, gender differentiation generally has been moulded into a social tool to not just differentiate but to discriminate against women to the undue advantage of men. "Gender ideology and gendered organisations institutionalise the favoured position of men as a group" (Padavic & Reskin, 1994) Gendered management thus is seen as leading to stereotyping of certain jobs as being primarily male or female with setting of pay and terms and conditions of work thereby institutionalising gender differentiation under the garb of gender discrimination.

Gender discrimination would lead to gender inequality and thus gender equality has been the overarching theme in the feminist movement as well as efforts to give women their due share in the world of work through advocacy groups and civil rights legislation. A subtle distinction is however made sometimes between gender equality and gender equity. Gender equality has been considered somewhat problematic not only by the opponents of women's rights but also the proponents. The idea is that people irrespective of whether they are men or women are not equal in terms of capabilities or preferences. Thus, to try to fit all women or all men into a single mould is not realistic. The concept of equity is a useful complement to that of equality in which case gender equity requires equality of opportunity as well as a fair allocation of constraints. (Rapoport & Rapoport, 1975)

Diversity has gained currency and acceptance within organisation over time. Legal frameworks designed to offer equitable treatment to disadvantaged sections of society, affirmative action by governments around the world, the feminist movement, and the need to make organisations more diverse so as to take advantage of globalisation are some of the factors that have made attaining diversity in human resources a laudable objective of organisations. Among the disadvantaged sections of society are considered people based on ethnicity, social classes such as castes, socio-economic groups and women. Thus, women have also benefited from the movement towards

increasing diversity within organisations and it is called gender diversity.

Gender diversity has been reported to offer several advantages. Of great interest to companies is the finding that gender diversity results in better financial performance. Catalyst, 2012 reports studies including from the consultants McKinsey that better performing companies have number of women in their executive ranks. Diversity, in general, is credited with imparting competitive advantage to companies in terms of growth and innovation. Further, diversity is also cost-effective as it helps retain employees. (Catalyst, 2012)

WOMEN IN THE WORLD OF WORK

Rising number of women in workforce is a phenomenon that is a remarkable feature of the developed economies. For instance, in 2012, women made up 46.9% of the work force in the United States. In management, professional and related positions, American women occupied 51.5% of jobs. (Bureau of Labor Statistics, US, 2013) In neighbouring Canada, women constituted 47.3% of the workforce and 35.4% of managerial positions. (Statistics, Canada, 2012). In contrast, women's participation in the workforce in India fell from 37% in 2004 - 2005 to 29% in 2009 - 2010. Out of 131 countries with available data, India ranks 11th from the bottom in female work force participation. (ILO, 2013)

The World Economic Forum, a Geneva-based think-tank, publishes an annual "Global Gender Gap Report", comparing progress in 135 countries towards sex equality in four broad areas. Of these four, most countries have largely closed the gap in recent years in two namely, education and health. In the third area of politics rapid progress is being made. The worst gap however remains in the area of economic opportunity. An adapted form of the Gender Gap Report 2012 is presented in Table 1.1. As can be observed, India's position is dismal with its ranking at 105 out of 135 countries ranked. South Asian neighbours such as Sri Lanka at 39 and Bangladesh at 86 fared much better.

Table 1.1: The Global Gender Gap Index 2012 rankings

Country	2012 rank out of 135 countries ranked	Country	2012 rank out of 135 countries ranked
Iceland	1	Sri Lanka	39
Norway	2	Bangladesh	86
Finland	3	India	105
United Kingdom	18	Pakistan	134
United States	22	Yemen	135

Adapted from The Global Gender Gap Report 2012: Rankings and Scores. World Economic Forum. Retrieved July 4, 2013, from http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GenderGapReport_Rankings_2012.pdf

Using the Global Gender Gap Index and data from Economic Intelligence Unit, Booz & Company devised a Third Billion Index that is a means of ranking countries in terms of how effectively they are empowering women as economic agents. Thus, they focus on a narrower focus on economic aspects as compared to the four parameters used to construct the Global Gender Gap Index. Analysis by Booz & Company leads to a very important conclusion: Women can be powerful drivers of economic growth. Raising female employment to male levels could have a direct positive impact on the gross domestic product (GDP) of a nation. (Booz & Co., 2012). This means that economic advancement of women does not only benefit women or their families but can be a cause for the overall economic prosperity of the nation. The Booz & Company report also presents a profile of countries including India. The analysis places India as average in terms of using economic advancement of women as input to deliver increasing economic prosperity as output. Angel Gurría, Secretary General of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is quoted in the report as stating that: "Women are the most underutilized economic asset in the world's economy."

While women's participation in workforce is seen as positive in many ways there is a difference of opinion regarding what the women themselves would prefer to do: work outside home in paid jobs or remain at home and look after family. A 2012 Gallup poll among women shows that nearly half of women prefer working outside home as compared to nearly 75% of men preferring to do that. This could also mean that half of the women surveyed did not prefer working outside home. In many of similar surveys seeking the preferences of women a majority of women have indicated that, given a choice, they would prefer remaining at home to look after their family and children rather than work outside. (Saad, 2012)

A Canadian report on problems facing working women reported a depressing situation. Women felt frustrated, overworked and overburdened. They felt that people make too many demands on them and that there is not enough support for them to turn to for help. The report goes on to point out that women's problems could even be aggravated by steps that are taken to alleviate them such steps being flexitime, better child care or by being able to retire in dignity. (Dunphy, 1987)

A comprehensive survey in Britain in 1999 found out that 84 per cent of the women surveyed felt disillusioned with their jobs. They found jobs tough, exhausting and often unrewarding, and 77 per cent would quit if they could. They felt that they were expected to perform too many roles.

The Indian situation with regard to problems faced by working women is quite different from that in developed economies. Women in India face discrimination even before they are born as there is the abominable practice of female foeticide owing to social factors. Even when they are born they face discrimination in the family with more resources, such as food, or facilities, such as education, available for male than for female children.

Most working women are concentrated in the unorganised sector where there is a high level of labour exploitation. They have no say in deciding who gets how much of the family's insufficient resources. This struggle is made even more acute because as women they have very little control over the conditions and products of their labour. (Gothoskar, 1992)

Urban working women face problems of a different type than those of their sisters in the rural areas. Even among urban women there might be different challenges women who are married and those who are single. Generally, the problems faced by married urban women are those of dual responsibilities of being homemakers and employees in a paid job, the conflict in role expectations from these two responsibilities, experiencing guilt feelings over neglecting children, lack of control over their own income, negative impact on marital relations, restriction on movement, and other problems such as lack of time and opportunities for building social relationship. (Mishra, 1994)

WOMEN IN MANAGEMENT

Women have responded to the increased opportunities for employment egged on by social factors such as the need to have dual-income families and to have financial security for them. Over time, we have seen an increasing number of women gaining better and higher qualifications, learning skills, and entering organisations in larger numbers. This has been happening all over the world including India. With increasing enrolment in educational institutions and professional institutions, women have been gaining the requisite qualifications to enter into the professional ranks and playing an increasing role in

managing organisations. Yet, the progress has been slow as evidence shows.

A McKinsey 2008 report on "the business case for women" points out that few women become top executives. In the countries of European Union, women occupy only 11 percent of the positions in governing bodies such as boards of directors and supervisory boards. Research from Columbia University and the University of Maryland reveals that in the United States, less than a third of the leading 1,500 companies had even a single woman among their top executives in 2006. Elsewhere the numbers are also not encouraging. In South Korea, for example, 74 percent of the companies surveyed in 2007 had no female senior executives. This situation of under-representation of women in management is not only unfair, says the McKinsey report, but also untenable in the long run. (Desvaux et al., 2008)

A follow-up report by McKinsey points out that there are no sure answers yet to the question of how to incorporate more women into the managerial ranks. But the experience of those companies that are making progress suggests that injecting greater rigour into people processes—more data, thoughtful targets that put women into positions where they can be considered for key roles, a company-specific business case for women, and better sponsorship approaches—can make a difference. (Barsh & Yee, 2011)

A report, "Sponsor Effect: UK", released by the Centre for Talent Innovation (CTI), a New York think-tank, provides information about women in the management in Britain. The report is based on a survey of about 2,500 graduate employees, mostly of large companies. The report says that although women in Britain account for 57% of new recruits to white-collar jobs, they make up only 17% of executive directors and just 4% of chief executives of the FTSE's 100 biggest companies. The dwindling flow of women into the upper levels of management is not explained by a lack of ambition as 79% of senior women in the sample said they aspired to a top job and 91% were keen to be promoted. The women are also not held back by family responsibilities as nearly 40% of those aged 40 and over had no children. (Economist, 2012, July 12)

A report by Catalyst a non-profit organisation engaged in gender diversity published the India Benchmarking Report that gives some indications of women representation at different levels of management in Indian companies. The report

compares female representation in local companies and in subsidiaries of foreign companies. Expectedly, the representation of women was better in the case of foreign companies' subsidiaries while in both types of companies the representation dwindled across the lower to higher levels of management. Attrition rates for women managers are higher than for men. Promotion rates are low overall but relatively better in foreign companies' subsidiaries. A large number of foreign companies' subsidiaries reported having an advancement of women strategy compared to just one-third of local companies. Among these strategies are mentoring programmes for women managers, encouraging gender diversity, efforts in recruiting more women and trying to retain them, providing them support through networking and resource groups, and offering flexible work schedules so that they are able to maintain a better work-life balance. (Bagati, 2011)

A report on women on corporate boards in India found that the percentage of women directors on top 100 companies listed on the Bombay Stock Exchange was only 5.3%. This figure was much lower than that in other countries including Australia (8.3%), Hong Kong (8.9%), UK (12.2%) and the US (14.5%). The report attempted to investigate the reasons for the low representation of women on corporate board and also tried to understand the challenges that women directors in India face. Women directors came mostly from family businesses; financial sector had relatively better representation; women directors were younger than their male counterparts even though they had spent nearly twice the time in the organizations they worked in. The reasons for low representation were mostly predictable such as bias in selection, under-representation of women in executive ranks, women more devoted to family than work. To counter these problems, the report suggested that selections be fair, women be given encouragement and training and government set an example by appointing women director on the boards of public sector organisations. (Banerji et al., 2010)

Contrary to the perception that women's participation in the Indian IT industry is high, the facts on the ground are a bit different. TV Mohandas Pai, Chairman, Manipal Global Educational Services Pvt. Ltd., is quoted from a seminar held in Bangalore as saying that "...Though there are more women in IT industry than any other industry, the numbers are only at entry level. In IT, they constitute 40% at the

entry level, 25% at middle level and only 8% at the top level...." The dwindling number of women at progressively higher levels of management is another facet of the challenges of enabling women participation in management. (Mukherjee, 2012)

Women in management face significant barriers to their advancement into higher ranks of management in organisations. Among these barriers are: poor academic achievement, inadequate occupational skills, gender stereotyping of occupations, gender discrimination, lack of mobility and transportation, and neglect of family and childcare.

A research into Malaysian and Australian women managers viewed family and personal responsibilities as their greatest impediment to attaining senior management positions as a consequence of which they are unable to manage careers and families simultaneously. (Jogulu & Wood, 2011)

An Ernst & Young survey has revealed that two-thirds of women employed in the United Kingdom believe that, rather than facing just a single barrier restricting their entry into the boardroom, they face multiple barriers throughout their working life. This survey of 1,000 working women aged from 18 to 60 identified four key barriers to career progression in UK organisations: age, lack of role models, motherhood, and qualifications and experience. When the respondents were asked to identify three things that their organisations could do to remove these barriers, the popular answers were: more support after returning to work from having children, additional support at every stage of their career lifecycle, and visible female role models. (ASTD, 2012)

Dissatisfaction with career progress drives many women out of the workforce in India and there are as many women who withdraw from due to the needs of childcare. This finding was brought out in a survey by Centre for Talent Innovation the report of which is available on a blog of the Harvard Business Review. The survey reveals that many women face difficulties in managing work and family obligations simultaneously. This is despite the fact that many Indian companies have started to offer flexible work arrangements yet women perceive that they may be penalised if they opt for them. Women who return to work after availing flexible work benefits feel stigmatised and find it difficult to manage their career progression. The survey has some interesting findings

among them is that eldercare in family is more important for Indian career women than childcare. This is a significant difference from what women experience in developed countries. (Hewlett, 2013)

Overall, women in management face multiple challenges right from the entry level to progress upward in their career as well as when they take a break from work and re-enter the workforce.

WOMEN AS MANAGERS

In their journey from being merely homemakers women have travelled far to become the breadwinners for the family. They have gone through breaking several social stereotypes to emerge as decision makers in their own right. But this journey has been arduous.

Ever since human beings changed from being wandering nomads searching for food and water to people living in communities men and women have worked together. Before the industrial revolution and even today in agrarian societies both men and women and also children worked together in the fields. Though there have always been gender-based differentiation in terms of work elements often based on the physical requirements of work, there has been the predominance of men in family affairs as well as the world of work. But in the agrarian context, the separation of family and work was not as evident as is the case of the industrial societies.

With the rapid industrialisation of societies, men worked outside homes while women were confined to the home devoting all their time and energy to child-bearing and childcare. When women started stepping out of their homes they started facing many challenges. For instance, at various times throughout history, working women have been perceived as immoral and unwomanly. Some critics have accused working women of being negligent mothers leaving their children in the care of strangers. Frequently, women employees were not taken seriously by their bosses, colleagues, or society (Nieva & Gutek, 1981).

Rapoport & Rapoport, 1990 have made a listing of the changes that are taking place in the world of work that create opportunities as well challenges for women managers. Among these are: workplace changes leading to lessening of muscle work and more of mind work enabling women to join the workforce; family changes leading to a great variety of family patterns from the traditional men as breadwinners to women as homemakers to dual career families

making it acceptable for women to work outside homes; changes in gender conceptions assigning new roles to both women and men while making it possible for people to gradually accept these roles; and demographic changes leading to situations where the industry requires more and better qualified workers irrespective of their gender or other distinguishing characteristics.

One of the changing paradigms in the world of work is the acceptability of women as managers. There are several reasons which support the business case for women as managers. Schwartz (1992) lists some of these reasons: when the net is cast wider to include women as prospective managers, the organisations have access to ample number of qualified candidates to fill the managerial positions; supporting capable women signals to the employees and customers that women would be treated similar to men; role models for junior women employees would be available; giving equal treatment to women employees would ensure that the positions are filled by capable individuals without discrimination on the basis of gender. This is especially relevant when organisations face scarcity of talented persons to fill up important managerial positions.

A follow up book in 2011 on the issue of Women in Management Worldwide edited by Davidson and Burke published initially in 2004, covered women in management in 20 countries around the world.

A summary of the findings of these different countries is as below. (Davidson & Burke, 2011)

- a. Women's participation in the workforce has increased in almost all countries yet occupational segregation still exists. Childcare was an important concern for women in almost all countries.
- b. Women had increased their participation in university education, equalling or exceeding that of men in most cases. Women are still predominant in the languages and social sciences as compared to men who are in a majority in engineering, mathematics and sciences.
- c. The proportion of women in management has increased but still remained very low at the higher levels of organizations particularly at board level. There was also considerable variability among countries in the percentage of women in management.
- d. Of interest to this part of the thesis, most women

working as managers are found in the functional areas of human resources, marketing and public relations while men managers continue to dominate mining, manufacturing, construction and engineering.

- e. There are increasing number of countries that enact legislation to support women at work and women in management. The impact of such legislation is low.
- f. There are only a few countries such as Canada, United Kingdom and United States where organisations have come up with initiatives that support the development and advancement of women.

Of significance to the progress of women as managers is the support available from their male colleagues. The support is dependent on the attitude and perception of men managers towards women managers that has also been an area of interest in the broader field of women as managers. A representative research study on the stereotypes associated with men and women managers reported that there was considerable change in male managers' views of women over the past 30 years, as evidenced by greater congruence between their perceptions of women and successful managers and stronger endorsement of and task-oriented leadership characteristics for women. Stereotypes held by male students changed less, remaining strikingly similar to stereotypes held by male managers 15 years ago. (Duehr & Bono, 2006)

Across cultures too, the differences in perception of women as managers persist. For instance, in a cross-cultural study of China and the US, it was reported that differences exist in perceptions by gender and nationality. Overall, women were perceived less favourably as managers by Chinese and U.S. males as compared to perceptions of Chinese and U.S. female participants. (Sincoff, et al., 2009)

The question whether having more women in top managerial positions in organisations helps advancement of women at lower levels of management is answered by a study in the US. The study focused on whether women in the highest levels of firms' management ranks help to reduce barriers to women's advancement in the workplace. The key findings of this study show that an increase in the share of female top managers is associated with subsequent increases in the share of women in midlevel management positions within firms. But the

positive influence of women in top leadership positions on managerial gender diversity diminishes over time, suggesting that women at the top play a positive but transitory role in women's career advancement. (Kurtulus & Tomaskovic-Devey, 2012)

CONCLUDING COMMENT

As the world economies developed and industrialised, the service sector opened up and non-governmental organisation extended their reach and breadth, there were increasing opportunities for women in the world of work. Yet, the progress of inclusion of women into the workforce has been slow and uneven across regions and countries. At the same time, women have attained more and better qualifications, have acquired training and experience suited to various types of jobs that were closed to them earlier and are proving their worth in different professions.

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