

FEMININE LEADERSHIP IN SERVICE SECTOR: CHALLENGES AND SUGGESTIONS

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ABSTRACT

In the ever changing era, leadership among women is a growing concept and service sector organisations are now more concentrating on feminine leadership. The basic objective of this paper is to study the challenges faced by women leaders in service sector and recommended suggestion to make feminine leadership effective. Women working in service sector play an important role in accelerating the pace of economic growth of a nation but experiences diverse challenges in their leadership positions viz., balance between work and family, lack of self confidence, limited access and network etc. This present study provides several implications to women and service organisations to make egalitarian work place for women.

Keywords: *Employee performance, feminine leadership, service sector.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The era of economic reforms and consistently high economic growth rate for several years has created more employment opportunities in general for men and women in particular, in the various service sectors. But in recent years, scenario has been gradually changed and most of the administrative positions were occupied by women (Dobre, 2013). Despite this positive evolution, the number of female leaders is surprisingly low. In the European Union, women hold only 11% of the top executive positions and account for only 4% of the CEOs and Presidents of Boards of Directors. In the United States, women have entered into the paid labour force in large numbers and now constitute 58% of workforce (U.S. Bureau of Labour Statistics, 2011) and in India, the percentage of women in senior positions in various sector has risen to 14%. According to a survey done by Economic Times (2011), there are only 16 women on the Board of Directors of the 30 sensex companies or only 4.8% hold Directorship positions. In the 100 companies of Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE), which throws up 923 directors, only 50 (5.4%) are women, while companies in the BSE 500 index have only 192 women (5.3%) out of 3650 persons holding Directorship positions. According to Catalyst India Benchmarking report (2010), Indian companies such as Tata Consultancies Ltd., Zensar Technologies, Tata Steel and Jindal South West (JSW) Steel Limited have 5-6% women in senior positions whereas MNCs such as Pepsi Company, Citigroup and General Electric Company had 15-20% women at the same level in 2012. This report also showed that 84% of Indian subsidiaries of multinationals have adopted women advancement strategy, compared with only 37% of India headquartered companies. A study on 500 fortune companies having women on the board showed significant performance advantage in terms of sales increases up to 73%, return on equity up to 83% and return

on invested capital up to 112%. In private banking sector, women cover 40% participation in its total workforce as compared to 43% of women representation in public sector banks in 2016. Women comprise 76.5% of those employed in hospitals and 79% of those employed in health service areas outside of the hospital venue (Bureau of Labour Statistics, 2013). Women tend to work better in complexity, are better listeners, emotionally intelligent and make a significant impact on different organisations by using their own style of leadership. There seems to be a shift in the new management era towards more feminine styles of leadership emphasising connectedness and collaboration in public leadership, including highly visible positions. Women attributes of nurturing, self sacrificing, being empathetic, sensitive, compassionate, cooperative and accommodative are increasingly associated with effective administration. While these characteristics are inherent and valuable, women possessing the attributes of a good leader still face higher attrition and slower career mobility (Powell, Butterfield & Bartol, 2008; Amondi, 2011). This paper is an attempt to conceptualise the problems faced by women working at top positions and recommended some suggestions to make women leadership effective.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Women are half the world's population, receive one-tenth of the world's income, account for two-thirds of the world's working hours but are the owners of only one hundred of the world's property. Women are at the heart of development process and participation of women in economic activities is essential not only for the individual development but also for the prosperity of households as well as for the economy as a whole. The process of industrialisation, urbanisation and the increased educational & employment opportunities for women have brought drastic changes in the traditional attitudes and values of urban women in India. In 2015, a total of 586 million women were contributing to the progress of the economy by engaging themselves in direct and allied agricultural activities, run small shops, sell by- product or handcraft products, community services, etc. Globally, the share of women as a contributor to family income has decreased significantly by 17 % over the last 20 years and to a lesser extent among men by 8.1% over the same period, resulting in a decrease in the income gender gap from 19.5% in 1995 to 10.6% in 2015. This trend is a part of an economic restructuring which impelled a shift among women from agricultural sector to service sectors like education, health care, banking, insurance, etc. Women hold 43% of the top executive positions and account for only 24% of the CEOs, presidents and board of directors, which surprisingly is increasing.

In India, 70% of the women are contributing to the economy by their active participation in different service sectors. Traditionally, Indian culture hindered women access to jobs in different public & private sectors, factories, stores and outlets, but that scenario has been gradually changing. The Women Reservation Policy (1974) has been framed to give the right to women for their representation in the Panchayati Raj system, as a sign of political empowerment. This bill has also involved some provisions for encouraging the women to find themselves in the position of respect and prestige in various sectors. According to the Economic Times Survey (2015), 33% women held the leadership position in education sector, 24% in banking sector, 17% in health care, 12% in insurance sector and 14% in corporate sector. This reveals that women have made substantial gains in the workplace and the glass ceiling has been broken. The successful women leaders are coming forward and making a significant contribution by providing cross industry mentoring for successor generations of women and providing equal opportunities to overcome prejudices against women abilities. Literature across samples & cultures also provided widespread support for issues of external and internal barriers for women's progress in

education structure (Barret, 2006; Oshagbemi, 2000; Spendlove, 2007; Jamali et al., 2005), corporate sector (Altintas, 2010; Anderson & Hansson, 2011; Kirkwood, 2009), banking (Hunjra, Chani, Aslam, Azam & Rehman, 2010; Riaz, Ramzan, Hafiz, Akram & Karim, 2012) and health (Viitanen & Konu, 2009; Cubilo & Brown, 2003; Hopkins & Bilimoria, 2006). A number of reasons for low representation of women in leadership positions are identified such as latent discrimination, male dominance, limited access, negative attitude from subordinates, inadequate family support, lack of awareness, fear of failure, job-family conflicts, lack of motivation, lack of confidence, low participation, low risk taking ability and lack of competitiveness (Oplatka, 2006; Elmuti, 2009; Correll, 2001; Ely, Ibarra & Kolb, 2011). Women representation at the top level of management is proportionately very low as compared to men which act as a major barricade for promotion of leadership among women.

III. NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

In India, despite increase in women's education and participation in service sector, representation of women in management jobs is significantly low as compared to men. The few women, who do make it to the top, make us believe that there is a sustainable change in the gender equations within corporations and businesses, which is not true. Altintas & Altintas (2008) in his study reviewed a very dismal outlook about women representation in management jobs in India and tried to understand the reasons and barriers that retard their progress. Bombuwela and Chamaru (2013) focused on the factors namely, individual factor, societal factor and organisational factor that act as impediments in the growth of women leadership and recommend strategies to overcome such barriers. This study is, therefore, significant as it will not only be looking into the reasons that contribute to such unequal gender representation in organisational leadership but also will recommend strategies for employer, employee and society in order to break the glass ceiling. On a macro level, the study will also contribute to the wider gamut of achieving gender parity and address the problems and barriers encountered by millions of working women in service sector. Moreover, it will also add to the knowledge (both quantitative as well as qualitative) about women managers in India by providing a timely and reliable statistics on the situation of women in management which will have an important role to play in the elimination of stereotypes and movement towards equality in the management and administrative sector and by introducing various strategies, rules or policies it will also contribute to make the world of work a more egalitarian place for women.

IV. WOMEN LEADERSHIP- BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

In modern competitive and dynamic business world, women constitute around half of the total workforce in service sector and play an important role in accelerating the pace of economic growth. But women experiences diverse barriers & challenges in leadership positions, which are discussed as under:

a. Balance between work and family

There are several possible factors that become pitfalls for the women on the path of leadership. Firstly, the impact of family responsibilities on women career is increasingly growing as men do not fully share domestic responsibilities. Women are putting their best efforts to trade off the work responsibilities between

family and career. Secondly, women while facing this balance are bent upon to take more leave, maternity breaks and less working hours.

b. Lack of confidence

Generally men are characterised as more confident than women especially regarding financial and complex decisions. Low confidence among women is evidenced from the fact that business women generally reports lower level of business profitability in all terms.

c. Women leadership identity

The role of the leader is process-oriented which serves as an identity to the person who internalises through feedback of employees and past experiences. Indian culture emulates that people have the stereotype notion regarding women leaders as not being decisive, assertive and independent whereas they possess friendliness, caring attitude and selfless attribute. This gender biases interfere with the development of women leader as an identity figure.

d. Role model

Female leaders are not considered to be good role model from employee's perspective. Women tend to use communication skills and behaviour strategies that have worked for them based on the past experiences whereas men will imitate strategies used by their seniors but still role modelling is not instinctive in women.

e. Career paths

Women are more likely to have non-linear career paths, spends more time with the family or generally avoiding the jobs with the out-of-town travelling responsibilities. As women climb the ladder of career growth, the responsibilities will become more imperative & demanding and they may face lesser flexibility across all regions which may create obstacles in their career path.

f. Networks, mentors and sponsors

The next challenge faced by the women leaders is the limited access to the networks and sponsors which are essential for women leadership success. Women leaders are reluctant towards networking as they perceive it to be inauthentic & treat it like an obligation to involve in stereotypical masculine and networking strategy.

g. Glass ceiling

The term 'Glass ceiling' means the invisible artificial barriers within the hierarchy that restrain deserving women to reach at top level of management. It is related with the feature of invisible & transparent layer that reflects informal rule & regulations to block the development of women in the same organisation towards the administrative management.

h. Resistance to female leadership

The next possible barrier for female leaders is that there is a direct effect of the unconscious use of gender stereotypes. Male employees develop a tendency towards resistance of women leaders which is based on their gender stereotypes notion. This confrontation is because of two stereotype beliefs i.e. gender symbolism and gender stereotypes.

i. Selection process

In spite of large pool of qualified and experienced women employees, companies do not consider them for the promotions thus, regarded as the obstruction in the selection process. Further, another rationale is that existing top management positions are held by men who tend to promote other male employees who are similar to themselves by avoiding the scope of promotion of female employees.

V. SUGGESTIONS TO MAKE WOMEN LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVE

The study provides several implications to women and service organisations to make egalitarian work place for women. These implications are as under:

- a. Service organisations should provide enough opportunity to their women employees for participating in organisational decision making process as it encourages them to put their best effort in the organisation.
- b. Women employees of the service organisations expect greater compassion from service providers towards their personal problems. Hence, it is suggested that service organisation should be more responsive to personal well beings of the women employees.
- c. It has been observed during the study that there is general stereotype notion against the women leaders especially among the male bosses & subordinates, thus, it is suggested that women leaders should break this notion by way of rigorous value addition so that they could be looked upon as role models.
- d. The success of women depends upon its ability to promote oneself and should be pushy about her performance and ambitions.
- e. Women should take personal responsibility to invest in themselves to build their own brand equity and embrace the requirements/additional skill sets needed to become part of the talent pool that is 'leader ready'. As part of this is that they should identify areas that are not in their natural comfort zones but are important to reach their career aspirations and bridge the gaps e.g. financial knowledge.
- f. Women should take initiatives in joining various networks that are broadly aligned with personal and career objectives that can create enabling environments for learning, sharing, building relationships and generating opportunities.
- g. Women need to empower themselves, so as to have the capabilities and confidence to attain leadership positions without waiting for those positions to be given to them. This effort of women put themselves as exemplary leaders within the organisation in the near future.
- h. The last but not least important step to be taken in this course of action is to change the women's mindset themselves. This should begin with a cultural shift of gender role perceptions.

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