

Women Leadership: A Reflection of Transformational Dimensions in the Organizations

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Abstract

Over the centuries civil society across the globe has undergone immense transformation. Gradually over some time, women along with men have started joining the workforce. In the present era, women have broken the shackles of gender stereotypes and have emerged as significant contributors to their respective fields. The present study makes an effort to understand the perspectives of diversity and inclusivity regarding gender representation in organizations. More specifically, the study makes an effort to have an insight into the regime of women in the lead in the modern-day organizational context. The current paper is based on a systematic review of selected articles on women's leadership published in academic journals. The findings of the aforesaid study appear to suggest that gender diversity and inclusivity do contribute to enhancing organizational prosperity. Additionally, it was also observed that women leaders are making a significant impact in fostering organizational growth. Henceforth, it may be said that the emergence of women in diverse fields is paving the way for further societal progress in the years to come.

Keywords: Leadership, Women Leaders, Gender Diversity, Inclusivity, Organizational Growth

Introduction

The emergence of the new millennium has witnessed the steady progress of women in many social and economic spheres. The stepping stone towards the spectacular shift was laid in the last millennium. Traditionally, both genders confirmed their respective gender roles set by societal norms. Men were supposed to go out and earn for the welfare of their respective families. Women on the hand were expected to nurture and look after their families. Over the decades societal changes have redefined the notion of gender stereotype roles. The sweeping changes in the social dynamics have allowed women to explore career opportunities. Of late, it is seen women are assuming leadership positions and are doing exceedingly well. This in a way has helped industries to understand the advantages of having a more diverse workforce across the organizational hierarchy. As an outcome organizations too are coming forward with more flexible policies to have a more gender-diverse and inclusive workforce. Throughout the past decades, women have shattered the so-called societal glass ceiling. Still, women remain underrepresented in the senior ranks of management. At the same time, it must also be noted that the present era is witnessing a wave of positive development when it comes to women's leadership in organizations. Thus, a comprehensive understanding of gender diversity, inclusivity, and women leadership at large will delve deeper to unearth the prospects of the same in the organizational context.

Review of Literature

Gender-Based Stereotypes

Gender stereotypes are generalizations of characteristics assigned to each gender at the societal level. Generally, warmth, care, compassion, and sensitivity have been associated with women. On the other hand ambition, assertiveness, aggression, and independence are often correlated with men. The commonly held societal belief suggests women folk take care of while their male counterparts take the financial charge of the family. Since the last century, there has been a gradual evolution in the status of women in society around the globe. From being considered to be inferior to males; women are now making their presence felt across the sectors. Alongside they are expected to carry out their family responsibilities along with their professional commitments. However, women are still found to be underrepresented in

positions of power. They also face pay discrepancies at the workplace. For example, Georgeac and Rattan (2019) stated inequalities in the domain of pay continue to be an ongoing issue in the realm of gender equality. Although women still face a lot of hindrances in making career advancement yet the time has come to embrace and cultivate gender diversity in business firms.

Social Progress of Women

Ever since the onset of the new millennium gender stereotypes in every field of work is seen to be slowly disappearing. The seeds of the present era change concerning the status of the women folk were been planted in the last century. One of the predominant factors that appear to have played a decisive part in shaping the present-day status of women is their access to education. It took generations to ease the barriers of gender prejudice in every society spread around the world. As put forward by Valerio (2022) the United States witnessed rapid progress and inclusion of women in the workforce. This transformation was attributed to the rise of educational achievement amongst female folk that paced up since the late 1960s. In the American context, it is found that women have steadily climbed up the corporate ladder. In today's world, female representation in the apex level of management acts as the torchbearer of gender equality in business firms. Thus, it may be said that in the coming decades, women will make further remarkable progress in diverse arenas of work.

Gender and Leadership

In simple words, leadership is described to be the ability of an individual to lead and motivate the followers to accomplish predefined goals. Leaders craft the way to achieve the pre-set objectives with their abilities. With the gradual influx of women in the organizations researchers were tempted to address the common question of whether gender has to do anything with leadership. The answer to the said question appears to be a bit dicey as some studies state that there exists gender difference when it comes to leadership while some other claims vice versa. For example, it appears to emerge from past studies such as those conducted by Eagly& Johnson (1990) and Eagly Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen (2003) that women leaders tend to display a participative or democratic style of leadership while their male counterparts are attributed to be exhibiting directive or autocratic leadership behavior. Interestingly, Groves (2005) asserted that women are found to exhibit transformational leadership behavior. On the other hand, some further studies concluded that

gender difference in terms of leadership is a myth. Other research studies attempted to explore gender qualities with leadership. One such study is that of Eagly and Karau (1991), who in their study that male leaders found male leaders performed in the arenas of short-term, task-oriented groups that did not involve social interactions. At the same time, women were prone to score high on social leadership behavior than their male counterparts. Hence, it appears to emerge from the prior research literature that women can take the lead from the front and emerge as notable contributors to facilitate organizational progress.

Objective

The present study attempts to evaluate the prospects of gender diversity and inclusivity in organizations. Additionally, the current study makes an effort to assess the regime of women leaders in their respective establishments. The type of organization primarily considered for the current paper is services business firms. The study predominantly takes into consideration of selected academic articles published between the 2014 and 2022.

Methodology

The current study follows a systematic review (Ridley, 2012) of selected academic articles on gender diversity and inclusivity in organizations and women leadership published in EBSCO-listed and PROQUEST-listed journals.

Findings & Discussion

Gender Diversity and Inclusivity

The present era is broadly described as an era of globalization. Diversity can be defined in many ways such as gender, race, ethnicity, religion, and so forth. A diverse workforce brings into the organization divergent perspectives on emerging issues. According to Donnelly (2017), 3% of Fortune 500 companies have come up with their workforce demographics on the organizations' websites to throw light on each organization's racial and ethnic demographics. Since the advent of globalization, there has been a steady rise in the rate of female labor participation. It is observed that certain jobs need a higher degree of social skills (Deming, 2017) this in fact may fit into the women workforce's employability on the ground. A significant number of studies suggest that gender diversity in the workforce is indeed beneficial for organizational growth in the long run. There are several advantages of having

diverse manpower in the organizations such as quality decision-making, higher profits, better crisis management, and so on. As stated by Catalyst Workplace (2014) business firms with a diverse workforce may lead to positive business outcomes such as better financial performance, lower rate of corporate fraud, higher levels of employee satisfaction, and engaging in a higher rate of innovation. Further, it is noted that at the board level, the presence of gender diversity is correlated with quality acquisition decisions, the lesser negative impact of the crisis on the units' performance, and better financial gains in the respective sectors of operation (Chen, Leung, Song, and Goergen, 2019). Additionally, it is asserted that securing gender equality in the top brass enhances the decision-making process and thereby contributes to shaping an efficient brand image of the respective business firms (Obert, Devi, Zororo, and Desderio, 2015). It is further observed gender diversity at the apex level of management is associated with a positive impact on financial performance and industries' competitive advantage (Belasen, Belasen, Belasen, &Belasen, 2021). Henceforth, it may be said that the growing number of literature on gender diversity and inclusivity is indeed a profound indicator that the workforce dynamics in organizations are gradually making a shift from the age-old 'men only' personnel to a fluid diverse human resource.

Women in the Lead

With the passage of time society across the globe has witnessed a change in the perceptions towards women. The higher rate of educational access and better healthcare facilities for women are some of the markers of the swift shift from age-old gender stereotypes. According to United Nations (2015), there has been a rise in women's representation in both educational and professional fields around the globe. Women who tend to exhibit masculine traits were more likely to gain access to occupations held by both genders than those with feminine personality traits (Drydakis, Sidiropoulou, Patnaik, Selmanovic, and Bozani, 2017). In the past few decades, women have set foot in professional territories which is an outcome of availing better educational opportunities. Bit by bit through the years women have made their own space in the male-dominated organizational spheres.

In simple words, leadership is described as the ability of an individual to lead, motivate and accomplish goals. Leadership and followership are reciprocal relationships. Leadership is an ongoing process that evolves with the passage of time and leaders gradually adopt their styles of working. Having a clear vision of the future, crisis responsiveness, ability to encourage

and motivate followers are some of the well-accepted leadership qualities. When women attain leadership positions they in a way get the opportunity to dispel the negative gender competency stereotypes in the organizations. Their presence in a productive way is helping erode the traditional thought process when it comes to gender stereotypes. Women's experiences and evaluations in positions of leadership differ from their male counterparts due to the mere fact that they are combating stereotypical social roles (Eagly and Carli, 2003). According to Vial and Napier (2018), women mostly prefer leaders who tend to display more communal leadership styles relative to men.

It is a commonly held view when it comes to women's leadership that women assuming positions of leadership tend to manifest their uniquely feminine qualities in their exhibited leadership behavior. Women's leadership style is often ascribed to an orientation toward care & help (Bryant-Anderson and Roby, 2022). Factors such as an environment cultivating trust, support at the societal level, new era organizational proficiencies, and rewiring of women's attitudes contribute to shaping the emergent women's leadership development and success (Lämsä and Savela, 2019). The presence of women leaders in organizations indeed brings forth a fresh school of thought. Remarkably, it is noticed that women managers carry out their tasks in more detail, and are more efficient in monitoring and encouraging development strategies (Brieger, Fancoeur, Welzel and Ben-Amar, 2019) on the organizational front. They are found to inculcate human and social qualities in their management style (Huse and Solberg, 2006). Alongside, they tend to focus on day to today interests with an objective and integrated approach. According to Eagly (2007), women tend to be democratic and participatory decision-makers.

There is a plethora of advantages to having women leaders in organizational settings. As pointed out by Arfken, Bellar, & Helms (2004) higher number of women represented on board and management teams may offer business units out of the box and innovative ideas and encourage better consumer behavior in the marketplace. Nevertheless, it is indeed noteworthy to observe how women leaders have steadily made their visibility in the diverse sectors of operations. For example: according to the Catalyst (2015), there was a time in the United States when there was no women top brass on board and slowly it progressed to having token representation of women in Fortune 500 board rooms. At the same time, it is observed that a higher number of women representations in the top chambers of management are noted to be associated with higher profits in terms of organizational growth (Noland,

Moran, & Kotschwar, 2016). It follows from the previous research studies that women through the pace of time have waded through the organizational barriers to bring forth an array of advantages that significantly contributes to shaping the pathway to organizational growth.

Hindrances to Career Advancement

Undoubtedly over the last few decades, there has been a steady inflow of women in the mainstream workforce but still, they remain underrepresented in senior ranks of the management pyramid. They still belong to the exception by rule in case of occupying leadership positions. They are entrusted with the job of shouldering family responsibilities along with making career progress. Nevertheless, women are faced with many obstacles in their pathway to career growth. For example, Barkhuizen, Masakane, and Sluis (2022) in their study analyzed the factors that act as roadblocks for women from climbing the leadership ladder in a variety of South African sectors. The study concluded that six factors act as the bottleneck for women to advance in executive leadership positions. They are societal perceptions towards women and gender-based stereotypes, inadequate guidance, masculine work outcomes, distorted leadership roles, insufficient training materials and development programs, and lastly improper work-life integration. Gender stereotype is the most common bottleneck that women face in their career graph. In the South African context, it is noted by Rogier and Padgett (2004) that has been a significant increase in women workforce participation in South Africa but they continue to face challenges when attempting to secure leadership positions in their organizations (Ronnie and Glaister, 2020). They further emphasized that women who showcase high commitment towards their career may be considered to be compromising with the commitment level of theyopt for flexible work arrangements and balanced work-life integrated policies. Through the decades women have significantly contributed to the process of organization building and the time has come for establishments and society at large to embrace the much-needed change and make way for the holistic development of the womenfolk and society at large.

Women Leaders and Organizational Growth

There are ample numbers of literature that evaluated the presence of women leaders across organization/s. The present paper also attempts to extend the ambit of studies exploring women's leadership. To do so, a few selected studies are illustrated to substantiate the

aforementioned finding that women leaders appear to have a significant impact in organizational settings. De Paola, Gioia & Scoppa (2022) conducted a field experiment to get an insight into how an individual's performance in teamwork is influenced by the gender of the leader or not. The sample for the prior mentioned study comprised students hailing from a university in Italy. The said samples undertook an exam that was partly assessed on team activity. The team members showcased higher performance outcomes in female-led teams. Consequently, it was found that male members held a pessimist view while evaluating the effectiveness of female leaders. On the other side, female members tended to preside over more favorable judgments. The finding of the study henceforth suggested that female leaders are found to be effective in work situations where cooperation is a pivotal element for working. Another study carried out by Peus, Braun & Knipfer (2015) examined how women in both Asia and the U.S. assume leadership positions and consequently how they exhibit their leadership style. They found contributory factors such as orientation towards achievement, inclination towards learning, and inspiring idols emerged as deciders that shaped the leadership advancement of women in the continents. Interestingly, Kirsch (2018) asserted that women leaders are found to be ethical thereby their presence leads to the minimization of risk when it comes to organizational fraud. The higher number of representations of women on the board of directors leadsto elevated expectations of the business firms to secure impressive ranking in the list of most admired organizations (Landry, Bernardi, and Bosco, 2016). Women folks have expanded their frontiers across the different spheres of organizations. One such area is that of representation of trade union leadership by women. Prowse, Prowse & Perrett (2022) investigated the leadership styles that are preferred by the representatives in the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) and thereafter singled out the implications based on gendered narrative leading toward the rise of women's representation in leadership roles in trade unions. The PCS happens to be one of the noteworthy unions in the UK with a large number of memberships (Certification Office, 2018). The findings of the study concluded that PCS lay representatives including both women and men preferred post-heroic (communal) leadership. The characteristics of post-heroic leadership are being helpful and empathetic which is usually practiced by women. More specifically, it emerged from the study that the principal five characteristics linked with post-heroic leadership are: being an ardent crusader of people skills, understanding listeners, being believers in the cause, being empathetic, and encouraging followers' empowerment. It was also observed that male leaders are aligned with heroic leadership that is characterized by

self-confidence and decisiveness. There have also been studies exploring the ethnicity of women leaders and what shaped their emergent leadership styles. Na and Kawahara (2022) conducted a study on women leaders of Asian lineage who navigated to the U.S. and thereafter occupied top positions in their esteemed organizations. It emerged from the aforesaid study that some key themes happened to have shaped their prospects of growth. They are the gradual progression of personal value systems into displayed leadership behavior, garnering guidance, mentorship, and effective support at the community level to accomplish remarkable outcomes via strategy-based communication and effective shift of context. Thus, it appears to emerge from the above-mentioned selected research studies that women are making their presence felt across the organizational spectrum thereby opening the gateway to further workforce inclusivity.

New Era of Women Leadership

Women occupying leadership posts inculcate feminine traits in their manifested leadership style. A recent study concluded that both genders of Generation Z prefer transformational and feminine leadership styles (Bornman, 2019). The steady progress of women in the workforce was slowed down during the outbreak of the Covid-19 virus pandemic. The gradual unfolding of the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted the normal course of life. Imparting education for children through online modes became the new normal. Organizations were perceived to be on the verge of losing women in leadership positions because they were found to be managing homeschooling with children and fulfilling domestic responsibilities (Valerio, 2022). Additionally, Valerio (2022) observed per the records of new enterprises, social media platforms, and business reports suggest that working women have faced direct and indirect effects of the pandemic aftermath. During the ongoing phase of the pandemic, researchers tried to figure out how leaders were responding to the pandemic. A 360-degree leadership assessment conducted between March and June 2020, comprising a large number of leaders found women scored higher as productive leaders than men on major skill sets and also secured impressive scores on engagement parameters (Zenger and Folkman, 2020). The aforesaid finding seems to corroborate Furst and Reeves's (2008) observation that women rise to positions of leadership during turbulent times they are open to embracing brand new talent pool and innovation and valorous ideas. More specifically, women are perceived to exhibit leadership behavior that encourages openness and inclusion and facilitates change. Therefore, it may be said that pandemic or no pandemic women leaders are appearing to thrive across

the situational contingencies, and at the same time their presence in organizations is making the way for the emergence of the next generation of leaders.

Limitations & Future Directions

The current study follows a systematic review of selected academic journal articles based on diversity, inclusivity, and women's leadership. Future studies following systematic review may be attempted to understand the rise of women in power in specific industrial sectors. Additionally, further research studies may incorporate empirical research on cultural pluralism and cross countries' perspectives to develop an integrated understanding of women leaders through the global lens.

Conclusion

In the past few decades gender diversity and more specifically women leadership in the workplace settings has been the core subject of many research studies. With the rapid advancement of globalization, the rate of women participation in labor force is on the rise. Women continue to make impressive gains by climbing up the management ladder in their esteemed organization. The stereotypical feminine traits such as nurturing, mentoring, and coordination are rapidly finding their place in contemporary organizations in the form of pro-social behavior. This in a way offers a lucid avenue for the academic scholars and practitioners to identify the suitable organizational systems and resources needed to make significant positive impact on their career advancement. In conclusion, it may be said that the visibility of women leaders in key positions will act as a pivotal tool to nurture and encourage the next generation of leaders in the years to come.

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