Do Organizational Politics Decrease The Visibility And Credibility Of Women As Leaders In Pakistan?

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Abstract: The debate about proper representation of women in the corporate sector has been under discussion for quite some time now. Although representation of women has seemingly increased in the work place; however, they are still underrepresented at higher echelons of the management. The factors of their under representation are various, however organizational politics could be one of the important factor in this regard. This study is an attempt to find out the role of organizational politics in this regard in the context of Pakistani society. The study is based on four dimensions of organizational politics, that is gender stereotype, organizational justice, threat rigidity and strategic alliances. In-depth interviews were conducted with sixteen female respondents of high profile, eight from academia and eight from the corporate sector. NVivo8 was used for elementary analysis, while certain inferences were also made, regarding the feedback of the respondents. Results indicate that three dimensions out of four of the organizational politics do contribute to the hindrance, in visibility and credibility of women leaders.

Introduction

The role of women in the workforce has been highlighted for quite some time now. Although the number of women has increased in the workforce, their role in the upper echelons of management is still quite disproportionate as compared to men. In fact Burns (2003), in his book about transforming leadership has not once provided an example of a female leader, which is noticeable.

Women do face prejudices on and off in leadership positions (Retamero et al 2006). The prejudices are of various forms each one needs to be defined in the most correct of meanings. There can be number of factors which can hinder the advancement of women in leadership positions, however, the most common of it is gender stereotyping. Some of the factors that are more common and prominent in workplace of women in western industrialized countries are gender stereotyping, organizational justice and threat rigidity (Kottke and Agars 2005). These have been replicated in this study to observe the patterns of difference in a Pakistani environment. Strategic political alliance, specifically indicated in the work of Davey (2008) seems an important element of the present study is added to the study as well.

Gender stereotype:

According to Dasgupta and Asgari (2004), females who are exposed to female leaders in a female dominating environment take gender stereotypes seriously to a lesser extent as compared to those females who are exposed to more of a male dominated environment. They found out that in some academic disciplines where males are dominant, such as math or science, the gender stereotypical beliefs of females increased in those disciplines. This can be mainly because in a co-education environment, one can compare and contrast more with male counterparts and thus the particular gender stereotype gets stronger.

Elsaid and Elsaid (2012), in their comparative study between the Egyptian and American cultures, came to the conclusion that men and women, both the gender in Egypt, has negative perception about women in the managerial roles. In the United States, however, women have more positive perception about women in managerial roles as compared to their male counterparts. One can infer from the above study that since Egypt still has a closed culture, even women themselves do not perceive women managers as somebody to be applauded with praise. In the United States, since both the gender perceive women managers as a positive aspect, however, still the male counterparts has a lesser positive approach.

According to Atewologun and Doldor (2013), contextual factors in different cultures should also be studied. One of the studies that they commented on was that men gave better readings to men on certain dimensions that men were good at; such as handling of equipment or dealing with numbers. Women gave better readings to themselves on traits such as teamwork and empowerment. Singh and Vinnicombe (2004) comment on the barriers that women face while reaching the upper echelons of the management. Some of the common barriers include prejudices in promotional processes, lack of career

counseling, salary indifferences or unintentional discrimination acts as well.

Threat rigidity

Threat rigidity is process in barriers to the advancement of women leaders. This means the offensive feelings that male members might feel when a woman reaches the higher position. The reaction or the action that male members take is then known as rigidity. Cheryan and Plaut (2010) talks of one of the form of social identity threat that women face, while climbing up the ladder of success. This form takes the shape of somebody who is not valued for his/her identity in the domain they are working for. Conell (2005) argues that in the past men's violence against women was considered actually an intervention to make things in order. This implicates that women were thought of someone that would question a man's authority; and this questioning of women was considered as a threat and putting this threat aside meant making things in order. Ragins and Sundstrom (1989) reports Collins (1983) that 87% of successful women say that mentoring is an important aspect in a woman's career.

Organizational injustice:

Organizational justice means the feelings of injustice that the woman might feel due to favor/discrimination to the woman. Miller et.al (1975) affirms the presence of disadvantages to women in organizations. However, the study tried to confirm whether these disadvantages occur due to lesser access to organizational resources or men perceiving the fact that women will challenge the vested interest of the male members by providing more competition to men and hence making it more difficult for men to climb the ladder of success. It was found out that second postulate, where men felt

women as threat to their ascent in the organizations was more authentic. This means that women face glass ceiling effect on and off when at workplace. Chester (2005) talks of identity, acceptance, relevancy feelings and cultural fit in the organization as important elements in advancement of women in the organizations.

In a study conducted by Lee and Johnston (2012) about inequalities in the Australian workplace, they pointed that in 1912 where women were of a threat to a lesser extent to males, they were paid between 54 and 66 per cent of the male wage rate. After developments in the legislations, females still received lesser wages in 1990's. This might be because females emphasize on issues like teamwork and men emphasize on issues like compensation (Hang et.al 2003).

Strategic political alliances:

It is interesting to know that in Australia, the women in the public sector say that they use rigorous lobbying techniques in order to promote women in the senior management positions. This is the reason that they take the quota system in a more positive manner as compared to females in the private sector (Rindfleish 2002). Eagly and Karau (2002) argues that gender disparities in organizations are generalized to an extent that it becomes unacceptable for male members to comply with female leaders. The perspective of Pakistani women was taken regarding these dimensions to find the extent of involvement of these factors in the advancement of women. Major objective of the study is to explore the role of organizational politics in reducing the visibility and credibility of women as leaders.
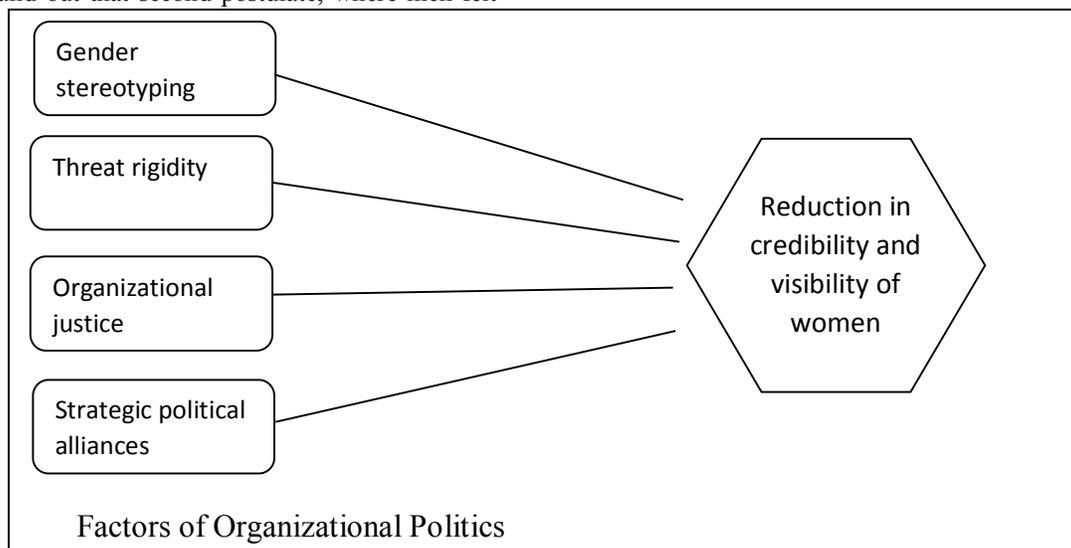
Methodology

Fig 1 Conceptual Framework

In order to attain the above objectives, in depth interviews were taken from sixteen respondents, hence making the study qualitative. The unit of analysis was women leaders at different positions both in academia and the corporate sector. Eight interviews were taken from the corporate sector and eight from academia to minimize the bias error. Convenience sampling technique was used and interviews were conducted both telephonically and face to face, keeping in mind the availability and time constraints of the respondents.

The elementary application of NVIVO 8 was applied to the study for data analysis.

Results And Analysis

Gender stereotyping

More than half of the respondents (10 out of 16) did agree that women and men are stereotyped at workplace. Rest of the respondents, however, were indifferent about this statement. This means that gender stereotyping does exist to a certain extent in Pakistani context as well. The respondents that were indifferent were so strong in their ambitions that it did not matter for them if the work environment was male dominated or not. Some of the respondents however, felt stereotyped at only certain stages of their career development.

The respondents, surprisingly, were more in agreement to threat rigidity element as compared to gender stereotyping. Three quarter of the respondents agreed that they faced threat rigidity in one phase of their career or the other. The rest of the respondents did not completely agree but did speak of observations about threat rigidity.

Table 1 Status of elements of organizational politics in the study

Factors	Agreed	Disagreed
Gender stereotyping	10	6
Threat rigidity	12	4
Organizational justice	4	12
Strategic political alliances	12	4

Organizational justice

The element of organizational justice was found relevant to the study to a lesser extent. Only a quarter of the respondents agreed on this element. The rest of the respondents did not feel any organizational injustice that has occurred to them. In fact one of the respondents said she was favored over others. A couple of respondents also said that they have actually seen women getting some favors.

Strategic alliances

This aspect was similarly strong like the threat rigidity element. Three fourth of the respondents agreed that on and off, strategic political alliances did work against them, especially when they occupied the higher positions in the organizations.

Findings and conclusion

After feeding all the interviews in the NVivo 8 software in the sources section and after noding of the interviews, the following model was found as relevant to the study.
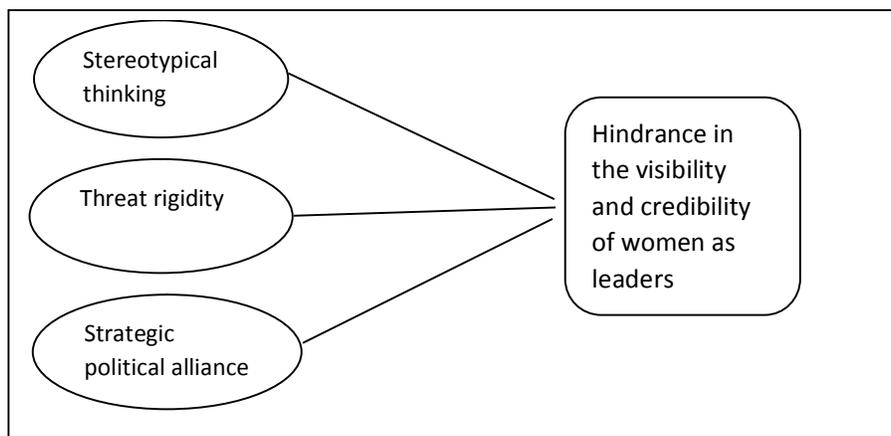

Fig 2 Key elements of Organizational Politics effecting women as leader in Pakistani society

Results indicate that three elements i.e. gender stereotyping, threat rigidity and strategic political alliances have considerable effect on women advancement in leadership positions. However, organizational justice did not have a significant effect on advancement of women leaders. The wordings may be different in the model but they relate to the same elements. This is surprising to know that in a Pakistani context, many women leaders do not feel that there is injustice in the organizations regarding gender. However, the other three elements came out to be positive and instrumental in advancement of

women leadership. Tanwir and Safdar (2013) also ascertain the fact that in rural areas too, participation of women in rural organizations is minimal, although their representation in agricultural economy is substantial. It is believed that in a Pakistani context, certain roles are typically associated to a particular gender and this perception prevails later in professional lives as well. Vasavada (2012) compares Indian women to gender stereotypes, contradicting that women's leadership abilities are not because of compliance to male guidelines but women have a balanced set of unique abilities which make them better leaders. Similarly, a lot of women do feel that as they advance towards higher positions, certain threats do mobilize in the upper management. At the same time, strategic political alliances also start working towards hindrance to the visibility and credibility of women leaders. It is, therefore, important to discourage these elements in the dynamics of the organization, so that women can easily move up the ladder of success, without having organizational politics as hindrance in their careers.

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