

Women Managers in Different Types of Organisations: A Representative Research Review

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Abstract

This review paper, based on survey of literature in the field of women in management, presents a panoramic view of the organisational themes that recur in research during the past about four decades. The field of women in management spans a variety of disciplines ranging from feminism to gender studies and the role of women in society, family and organisations. Coupled with the fact that women increasingly play an important role in all these areas, research in the field has traversed a number of themes, issues, sectors, industries, and organisations.

This review article identifies several broad organisational themes in the literature on women in management. Several themes such as work-life balance, gender inequality and glass ceiling syndrome constitute a common thread across different organisations. There are but few research studies that might address questions related to the nature or type of organisation as a differentiator. Issues such as feminine values causing women managers to gravitate towards certain professions, careers, and organisation are yet to be addressed adequately in literature. This paper suggests several questions that could form the basis for propositions that could be investigated in future researches.

Keyword: Women Studies, Women in Management, Research on Women Managers.

Introduction

Research in the broad field of women in management has attracted considerable attention in recent years. Such research is picking up particularly due to the after effects

of the feminist movement. Interest in women's studies around the world, in general, has also led to increasing focus on working women in organisations. Contemporary research literature on subject of gender in management has been nurtured by intellectual contributions coming from several different streams of knowledge. Among these are debates in and around feminism, the burgeoning field of women's studies and critical studies on gender, and on recognizing women and their experiences, situations and viewpoint in societies, organisations and management.

Research on 'women managers' or 'women in management' leads one to several overarching themes. These themes recur throughout the literature on the subject. A scheme of identifying the overarching themes has been evolved in the present research project from which material for this paper is drawn. This scheme identifies three broad directions of research in the area of women in management. These are: behavioural themes, organisational themes, and spatial themes. *Organisational themes* include the significant issues of work-life balance, gender inequality, and glass ceiling syndrome. *Behavioural themes* identified are attitude, communication, leadership, motivation and personality. *Spatial themes* include women in different geographies and in different industries and types of organisations. The subject matter of this article is women in different types of organisations.

This review is based on a comprehensive search of databases available in library databases including ProQuest's ABI/Inform Global, EBSCO's Academic Search Complete, Emerald Fulltext Plus, ScienceDirect, and Social Science Research Network; and search engines such as Google Scholar and Directory of Open Access Journals.

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Objectives of Review

Research on women in management has often focused on organisations where they work. This may be due to the fact that a particular research study may focus on one type of organisations. There could also be the possibility that women managers working in different types of organisations are perceived to exhibit different characteristics. Further, some research studies have observed that women managers seem to be concentrated in a few types of professions and consequently end up working for particular types of organisations. This may also happen as women are conditioned socially to choose some types of professions ending with careers in certain types of organisations. Occupational segregation, as a paper on the theories of such segregation notes, is widely prevalent in every region of the world, at all economic development levels, under all political systems, and in diverse religious, social and cultural environments. (Anker, 1997)

The objectives set for this review are:

- Provide a broad sweep of review -albeit representative in character -of women managers in different types of organisations;
- Keeping in view that the repertoire of sources is large, aim to include only a small set of representative studies on each type of the organisations identified in the research review;
- Attempt to include a selective list of the types of organisation as representative of research in this area as it would be impractical as well as difficult to cover all or even most types of organisations;
- Discern indications of trends in research directions in a particular type of organisations. With this in mind, the types of organisations that could be described are academic institutions, banking and financial services, non-profit sector, government sector and public services, and information technology companies. In a preliminary survey of literature these organisations were likely to have a noticeable representation of women as employees; and
- Identify gaps in research gap and make suggestions for future research in the area of women in management with particular relevance to the type of organisations they work in.

Women in Academics

The discussion starts with academics as this is one area where women managers or women academic administrators in educational institutions such as schools and colleges are perceived to be widely represented. There is a welcome abundance of researches on women in academic leadership in the medical field followed by that in science and technology. Within the medical field, studies have examined even at the individual specialisations such as paediatrics, psychiatry or surgery indicating a strong research tradition. In terms of academic level, research studies focus more on the primary and secondary levels as well as the higher education level.

Women in most developing countries are surpassing men on educational attainments (Neal, Finlay, and Tansey, 2005). Despite their impressive performance, women's career path to top leadership positions continues to be precipitous (Eagly and Carli, 2007). Massive research evidence of the education communities and social science, agrees that men and women styles of leadership definitely differ in many instances (e.g. Chliwaniak, 1997; Helgesen, 1995). This may be attributed to most developing countries being patriarchal societies, while others have deeply entrenched and inhibiting religious cultures; scenarios that tend to accelerate the glass ceiling for women (Kiamba, 2008).

A study on the role of women in both horizontal and vertical administrative structures in four Catalan universities in Spain points to the existence of both external and internal barriers that explain the lack of women in university administration. Among these barriers, organisational culture appears as a change-resistant element that promotes an environment dominated by male values and justifies most women's self-exclusion from university administration. (Tomàs *et al.*, 2010)

Noble and Moore (2006) argue, until a replica and practice of the new women leaders is made public, women are still in jeopardy of remaining at the periphery of institutional leadership, and will continue to possess little exchange in the current deliberation. Moreover, women need to become effective change agents in dominant male-oriented administrative academic environs. Although obstacles facing women in higher education, including advancement, or forums to articulate concerns, are not

effortlessly conquered, women themselves must revolutionize the philosophy prevalent in higher education administration. While the race and gender discrimination is pervasive in higher education, ambitious women should not be deterred (Wajcman, 1999).

According to Gilligan, Lyons and Hanmer (1990), women characterize themselves more in terms of their relationships and bonding to others as compared to men. Also, a survey of men and women educational leaders conducted by Rosener (1990) found that there were certainly differences in leadership. Women's way of leading was illustrated as transformational, whereas men were distinguished as transactional. Ross and Green (2000) acknowledge, in higher education, statistics supply verification that women, racial and ethnic minorities are underrepresented in academic and administrative leadership positions.

Research in the Indian context on women academics is sparse. An early example of a study is by Subrahmanyam (1995) that discusses problems women academic scientists in India face because of gender. She observes that women scientists are aware of how their position in the academy is different from that of men but have not made efforts to address their problems collectively. A relatively recent perspective on gender inequality is offered in Tandon (2007) that deals with the barriers to leadership positions for Indian women in academic dentistry and offers a mixed picture of optimism and caution.

Overall, a lot of studies in researches on women in academia, as the representative studies above demonstrate, are focused on work-life balance and stress at work, challenges of leadership and glass ceiling, gender inequality and other similar issues. The quantum of researches is tilted in favour of the academic fields of medicine and science and technology.

Women in Banking and Financial Services

The second type of organisation that is considered here is the banking and financial institution as these occupations are generally considered to be depending on mind work rather than manual work, hence more suited to women managers.

The ILO (2007) reported that despite increased numbers at lower grades, women are not making breakthroughs to CEO and executive jobs within the financial services industry of most developed countries. Women's numbers and entry into senior management positions remain a major concern for banks in the developing countries (Charlesworth and Baird, 2007). This is so even when there is tremendous increase in the number of women joining the banking industry. Yet, most of these women are still clustered in clerical, teller, and support staff levels (Brizendine, 2008). The evidence is clear that just like in other countries, women's share of the administrative and managerial positions is far less than that of their male counterparts in the banking industry. (Brizendine, 2008; Ndemo and Maina, 2007). Earlier research too points the anomaly of more women in lower ranks in banking. A study by Burdett (1994) in Australia observes that women entered the Australian banking industry to "fill in" for men and were left in lower grade, non-career jobs on their return. For the majority of women, little has changed with respect to their status in the industry. They outnumber men in lower level clerical grades and perform the bulk of part-time work.

A case in point is the Kenyan banking industry where, over the past decade, the role of this industry in national development has increased significantly, and so has the participation of women in financial activities as employees, managers, and customers (Suda, 2005). Yet, even as statistical data indicate the Kenyan banking industry is predominantly female yet systemic discrimination against women in regards to executive top positions abounds. (Stewart, 2007; Quinn, 2007)

An examination into the career patterns of women in banking and finance could be helpful to understand the low participation of women and the glass ceiling they face. An example of such research is Blair-Loy (1999) that examines the objective and subjective facets of female finance-executive careers. She finds that the careers are shaped by workplace structures and by the early 1970s enforcement of women's employment rights in the United States and notes that as women have experienced more freedom in pursuing finance careers, their career trajectories have become more rigid.

Another case is of women in the Lebanese banking industry. The study gauges the perceptions of Lebanese women managers regarding corporate governance issues

pertaining to board effectiveness, roles and responsibilities and the benefits of female representation on boards. The findings indicate that Lebanese women managers consider that the low representation of women on boards in Lebanon is related to the prevalence of glass ceiling. They also believed that women board representation can reflect positively on the status of women at work and that government intervention is needed to level the playing field for women in management and at the boardroom level (Jamali, 2007).

Research in Indian context on women managers in banking and finance is virtually non-existent though they do form sub-groups as subjects of research in general issues such as gender inequality or glass ceiling. Much of the research in banking and finance on women is from the perspective of women as users of such services as in the case of rural entrepreneurship or microfinance.

Women representation in banking and financial services seems to suffer because of the perception that they are better suited for lower level jobs. These lower level jobs could be in the nature of repetitive, low-paying, clerical jobs taken up by women with lack of qualifications and experience for higher level ones. Their progress upward may also be impeded by the prevalent glass ceiling factors observed elsewhere.

Women in Non-Profit Organisations

Non-profit sector, or what is popularly known in India as non-governmental organisations (NGOs), is perceived to be a group of organisations that employ a large number of women. According to some estimates, there might even be a larger number of women than men working in the non-profit sector. Yet, it is noted that there is a disparity in the number of women in executive and senior level positions in contrast to the current and increasing number of women in the non-profit sector. Men continue to hold senior level positions despite the vast increase of women entering the workforce (Ya-Hui Lien, 2005).

An exploratory study of a cross section of non-profit human service organisations investigated whether and to what extent a glass ceiling exists for women in this sector. The findings indicated the existence of the glass ceiling among the agencies studied. Men are disproportionately represented in management of these non-profit organisations, particularly at the upper-level management, and they earn higher salaries than women

at all hierarchical levels of the organisation. (Gibelman, 2000)

An exploratory study on women managers in non-profit organisation revealed that though there were a higher number of female chief executives and fiscal officers yet there were fewer female board members and board presidents and treasurers. The study also notes earlier studies that observed that despite the predominance of female employees and volunteers in non-profit organisations, research indicates that there are fewer women serving as chief executive officers and board members when compared to the number of men in those positions (Pynes, 2000).

The fact that there is indeed a glass ceiling in non-profit organisations is confirmed by a study that pointed out that women managers in the non-profit sector are both underrepresented and under-compensated. Generally, employee earnings in non-profit tend to be lower than those in the government or for-profit companies. In addition, women in the non-profit sector are paid less than their male counterparts. A large number of women in the non-profit sector work for small and mid-size organisations. Within the field of fund raising, prior research indicated that women comprise the majority of members of professional organisations. There are more women than men entering the profession yet the salaries for women are just two-thirds as compared to those of men in comparable positions. (e.g. Sampson and Moore, 2008; Mesch and Rooney, 2008)

Research on non-profit organisations in India is plentiful but focusing on women issues or the role of women managers is rare. A recent study focuses on women leadership in non-profit organisations in India. The author observes that previous researches indicated that women have specific attributes, characteristics, and skills that help them employ an androgynous style of leadership that tries to balance feminine and masculine attributes. However, the author proposes that the strength of women's leadership lies not in their ability to conform to prevailing masculine stereotypes of leadership, but in their unique abilities (Vasavada, 2012).

The context of non-profit organisations offers research issues worth examining. For instance, there are opportunities to delve into the issues of glass ceiling, gender inequality specifically the issues of pay disparity and occupational segregation.

Women in Public Sector Organisations

As compared to non-profit sector, there are also a large number of research studies reported of women managers and administrators working in the government sector and public services. One would expect governments to be even-handed in encouraging, recruiting, and promoting women at par with men in organisations. Yet, the picture that emerges is more or less the same as in other types of organisation discussed in elsewhere in this article.

A study on women's employment in the civil services of United Kingdom reveals that women are proportionally over represented in the junior grades and under represented at the senior levels to the point of being virtually invisible. The distribution of women within the civil service is the result of the levels at which women are mainly recruited and that this, in turn, reflects the proportion of women among people with the right qualifications for the various recruitment grades (Brimelow, 1981).

A longitudinal review of the representation of women in the Canadian federal public service over a period of thirty years brings out many of the familiar themes in women in management. The review notes the important differences in the way that men and women civil servants deal with their environment. For instance, the process of socialisation or the way communication is used differs among men and women administrators. In the public service, a typical competitive approach as some would characterise is as masculine prevails. An integrative style preferred by women is the one that places more emphasis on team-building, participation and responsiveness. A significant point made in this review is the suggestion that management moves beyond employment equity, where the emphasis is on increasing the representation of women, to a focus on valuing and managing the diversity that women and other minority groups bring to the workplace, so that full advantage can be taken of the variety of perspectives, skills and abilities of all employees. (Hynna, 1997)

Nearly half the population and three-fourth of public service in Russia is peopled by women. Yet, little seems to have been done to enhance the role and status of its female public servants. Legislative measures are often contemplated but rarely implemented. A study examines the experiences of public servants within different structures of both the federal and regional public service of Russia. It points to the danger of governmental reforms

addressing gender and the expression of gender power within the public services. (Antanova, 2002)

A common response to the Maladies in dealing with women public servants has been to implement policies and programmes to facilitate the entry and sustenance of women in public service. The Korean experience in this regard is documented in a paper by Kim (2008) that discusses the desires and realities of women and family-friendly policies in the Korean government. The positive development is that the implementation of gender equality policies has increased the participation of women in public services. The purpose has been to institute family-friendly policies to enable women civil servants to balance work and family life. However, as usual, the policies are not properly implemented because they are not properly bundled and male-centred organisational practices discourage women to take advantage. The paper points to the need for not only such policies to be framed and implemented properly but also enabling supportive culture to be provided.

A study on women administrators of All India Services-Indian Administrative Service (IAS), Indian Police Service (IPS) and Indian Forest Service (IFS) focuses on the position of women in these services, the experiences of women officers, their opinion on other women in the services, existing discriminatory factors in the services, the attitude of their male colleagues and at home and their satisfaction and happiness with their family life (George, 2011). A contemporary research by Naqvi (2011) on the perspectives of women managers in public enterprises highlights several issues including leadership. Commenting that the women in India have struggled to establish an identity and create a space for themselves at their workplaces, especially in terms of leadership. The study investigates women's perceptions and dilemmas when confronted with the ideas and expectations of traditional society simultaneously conforming to a modern-day code of conduct at work.

Women in Information Technology Organisations

Women are underrepresented in the information technology (IT) profession at the senior executive level worldwide. In the United States, the White House Council of Economic Advisors, in 2000, reported that women are scarce in the ranks of senior IT management

levels. Compared to 47% in the general workforce, there were only 29% women in IT occupation (Bentsen, 2000). However, according to the Women's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Labour, women hold 43% of executive, administrative and managerial positions but they account for less than 3 percent to 5 percent of top executive positions nationwide (Wells, 2001). In essence, if women in all professions accounted for less than 3% to 5% of top executive positions overall, female senior executives in IT accounted for just 1% to 4% of the overall percentage nationwide (Nelson-Porter, 2004).

The challenge of breaking the glass ceiling is present in the IT field as much as it is in other areas. Michie and Nelson (2006) attempted to investigate if perceptions that women and men hold toward careers in IT and toward women working in IT create potential barriers that may prevent women managers from pursuing careers in IT. The findings indicated that traditional work role expectations concerning women's efficacy for highly technical careers persisted. The study suggested that if organisations want to attract, retain and advance women in IT field, they must proactively address gender role biases and create work environments that build self-efficacy expectations for women.

Iris and Jiehua (2007) explored women managers' experience on career in relation to the Chinese cultural environment and within the IT industry. They noted two trends of high future expectations and strong belief in own competence. The findings of this study suggested that IT women managers are high achievers with a high level of ambition. There is joy of career advancement and full use of their potential. Although there were only few women in top-level positions in China, the study confirms their potential to succeed in management in the developing field of IT.

It is observed that talent shortage in some rising industries including IT creates conditions where women professionals and managers can find better opportunities in organisations. A review by Ahuja (2002) notes that gender differences in IT careers appear to be affecting the competitiveness of companies globally. Given the labour shortage in the IT industry, the study suggests that it has become more important than ever to reduce sources of leakage in the IT career paths of women.

A study to compare the attitude of young people towards women managers suggested that there has been gradual

improvement in the perception of women as managers by men in the science and technology fields (Hackbarth *et al.*, 2010).

One would expect women managers in information technology organisations to be well-researched in the Indian context but this does not seem to be true. Few researches are available on women managers in the Indian IT organisations. For instance, Kelkar *et al.* (2002) examine women's agency in the software industry and IT-enabled services organisations in Bangalore and Delhi. They observe that while a large number of women continue to work in gendered homes and work sites, balancing work and domestic responsibilities with little help from the men, they do, however, carry on an ongoing struggle to challenge embedded patriarchal relations within the family and in the industry. They further note that there are socially sanctioned gender inequalities in the market and women prefer to work outside the home in an attempt to improve their social position and construct greater scope to enhance their agency, than be subject to family-based dependency and coercion. Mohsin (2004) investigates the intensity of organisational role stress among women information technology professionals in the Indian private sector. Organisational role stress is caused most by resource inadequacy followed by role overload and personal inadequacy.

Suggestions and Research Gap

From the foregoing review of representative sources it is observed that women in different organisations seem to face similar challenges, predicaments, and problems. For instance, as a part of occupational segregation phenomenon women may be represented better in some organisations than in others. Yet, pan-organisational issues such as work-life balance, gender inequality, and glass ceiling seem to be pervasive irrespective of the type of organisations.

There are several interesting as well as intriguing questions that could be the basis for inquiry. Some of these illustrative questions that arise from the representative research review in this article could be stated as below. These could be considered as illustrative of the research gap that exists in the field.

- Is the explanation that since masculine and feminine values are different, the very nature of feminine values (e.g. caring or empathetic) may become the

cause of gender discrimination against women managers in organisations?

- Do feminine values such as lack of aggressiveness hinder the upward movement of women managers particularly in demanding environments present in organisations such as banking and financial services?
- Could there be inbuilt biases in the common perceptions that there are certain professions and organisations (such as academics or non-profit organisations) that are more 'suitable' for women managers?
- Would endemic issues such as work-life balance, gender inequality or glass ceiling syndrome differ across different types of organisations? If so, what could explain such differences?
- Why do women seem to gravitate towards a particular industry or certain types of organisations consequently being overrepresented in those organisations particularly at the lower levels of management?
- Does the present emphasis on counting the number of women in higher positions in organisations resolve the issue of measuring the presence or absence of glass ceiling within and across organisations? Could there be better methods to achieve these purposes?
- Does the fact that several studies find women leadership to be predominantly transformational than transactional explain their perceived suitability to certain types of organisations?
- Does greater need for work-life balance among women managers cause them to trade-off opportunities for career advancement in favour of stability leading to their being discriminated in matters of pay and promotion?
- Why even non-profit organisations, several of whom could themselves be concerned with gender inequality in society, experience gender inequality and glass ceiling within?
- Does scarcity in employment markets in certain industries or sectors create better and more opportunities for women managers? Is the reverse also true?

Overall, this representative research review supports the agenda that understanding the context of organisations is important to viewing the role of women – as well as men – managers to the achievement of the goals of

the organisations. Different organisations could offer a different context and this creates the need for study and research in this interesting and challenging field of academic endeavour.

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