

Impact of Double Bind & Promotional Paradox on Work Performance of Women

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Gender inequality is not only a pressing moral and social issue, but also a critical economic challenge. In recent decades, global movements and charters have recognized that women have the right to equal opportunity, equal access to resources, and freedom from discrimination. These efforts have partly paid off. Women have entered the workforce in greater numbers, and today they occupy positions of leadership in government, business, and civil society. Nevertheless, women have yet to achieve parity in labor markets and in key aspects of their everyday lives. This paper focuses on understanding the problems and challenges the women managers face in work situations that put them in double bind paradox which further impacts on their work performance.

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Introduction

“Becoming a leader depends on acting like a leader, but even more crucially, it depends on being seen by others as a leader.”- Natalie Porter and Florence L. Geis.

India is a diversified country with varied traditions and customs and in all the creeds, women hold an esteemed position. But since ages the role of women has been restrained to household responsibilities and limited to innate issues. With the change in time, the potential of women was recognized and progressively status of women wheeled up in the society. Further, the focus on education of women also transformed the role of women. Due significance was given to women's career and professional life (Kumar, Sundararajan & Mahendran, 2015).

One of the most substantial and optimistic changes taking place all over the world is the increasing number of women in every type of profession. The current trend suggests a promising rise of women in managerial positions all over the globe but the cause for concern is that they are mostly focused in the lower and middle levels of management and their repre-

sentation at the senior and top management level remains extremely low (Buddhapriya, 2009). A rising body of research points out that stereotyping is a key contributor to the gender gap in corporate leadership (Catalyst, 2007).

Organizations around the globe are making commitments to develop future leaders and increase the diversity in workforce so that better results can be achieved for customers, stakeholders and employees. However, there is a noticeable lack of emphasis on leadership development for women, which is one of the largest of all diversity groups in any geography (Neill & Boyle, 2011).

There is a noticeable lack of emphasis on leadership development for women

When women are in a situation where they are at risk of being judged by a negative stereotype they tend to underperform relative to men (Shantz & Latham, 2012). Irrespective of whether the justifying factor is discrimination, the extreme gap of women versus men at the highest levels provides energy for many of us to push together harder and go beyond in creating a fair and just system that will allow more women into leadership pipeline but the mixed messages deprive women of confidence and crush their desire to jump into the fight. The world today needs the best competent women to set up to the plate and women should be able to knit their way through the challenges (Flynn, Heath & Holt, 2013).

Women managers are conspicuous by their minority in Indian organizations. However, studies show that Indian organizations are better off than their Western counterparts as far as presence of women in the top management is concerned. Around 11% of the top corporate organizations in India are headed by women against a corresponding figure of 3% for Fortune 500 companies. Trends in the Indian banking sector are highly favorable for women leaders.

But now comes the hard part. Despite the success of high-profile women, female bank employees face many hurdles in climbing the corporate ladder. Indian women often turn down promotions if it means shifting to another location and disrupting their family life. As in Western corporations, Indian businesswomen feel they have to perform above and beyond the standards for men in order to advance and ultimately shatter the glass ceiling. You need to have high knowledge levels and you need to work 10 times harder than your male colleagues to prove yourself.

Financial institutions have the persistent problem of female employee retention and advancement into higher level positions. In particular, stereotype threat plays a significant role in fostering a chilly climate, whereby female employees feel as though they do not belong and choose to exit. This gives a direction towards considering financial services sector concern for promoting women in leadership roles.

Double Bind Paradox

Women must be able to project the seriousness in order to advance at work but at the same time they are also required to maintain their “feminine mystique” in order to be liked. Perhaps, gender stereotypes are making it difficult for females to feel comfortable in taking authoritative positions because they are observed as either competent or liked but rarely both (Flynn, Heath & Holt, 2013). This is something that puts a woman in the situation of double bind. Double bind is defined as a psychological deadlock which is created when contradictory demands are made of an individual so that in every matter which ever directive is followed, the response will be considered as incorrect (Catalyst, 2007).

Gender stereotypes are powerful but invisible threat to both the women professionals and organizations in which they work and lead.

We all know the feeling of being stuck in a double bind – that troublesome sense that whatever we do, we cannot do it right. Gender stereotypes are powerful but invisible threat to both the women professionals and organizations in which they work and lead. A wealth of studies have found that both women and men perceive that the qualities attributed to be a successful manager are more likely to be held by men rather than women (Boyce & herd, 2003; Cabrera, Sauer & Thomas-Hunt, 2009).

Research on double bind dilemmas for women concentrates in particular on ‘gender stereotyping’. Stereotype can be defined as mental shortcuts or generalizations that are used to make sense of our complex social world. These shortcuts help us to differentiate among different groups of people and in gender stereotypes, between men and women.

Both men and women proclaimed that men excel at conventionally masculine “taking charge” kinds of skills such as persuading superiors and problem solving characteristics (Agars, 2004) whereas women are viewed as out of place and require to put great effort into proving them otherwise (Catalyst, 2005). Stereotypes create an invisible obstacle to women’s advancement, which are often difficult to fight or even detect. Another challenge consists of stereotypes’ rigid nature; as people believe that men and women should behave in ways that are gender consistent (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Double Bind Dilemmas

According to Catalyst (2007), there are three specific predicaments or double bind dilemmas that women face at work-place:

- a. Extreme perceptions: Too soft, too tough and never just right.
- b. High competence threshold: Women leaders face higher standards and lower rewards than men leaders.
- c. Competent but disliked: Women leaders are perceived as competent or likable but rarely both.

Predicament 1: Extreme Perceptions: Too soft, too tough and never just right.

Women are caught in a catch-22 situation regarding leadership, if they are strong they are seen to be aggressive and if they work more in a consultative way they are seen to be weak.

Stereotypes strongly influence the general perceptions of women leaders, especially when women do make it to the top their performance goes through extra analysis and is subject to criticism than men leaders' performance. In general, research has shown that both women and men tend to express more positive attitudes towards male supervisors than towards women supervisors. Women are therefore evaluated negatively on important work dimensions such as performance, leadership ability, and problem-solving. On average, men have a tendency to express more reservations about female leaders' effectiveness than women do (Eagly, Makhijani & Klonsky, 1992).

Predicament 2: High Competence Threshold: Women leaders face higher standards and lower rewards than men leaders

Stereotypic perceptions create another predicament for women leaders. As exemplary leaders, men's potential to lead effectively is rarely examined a priori but women have to prove that they can lead even before they have been given the opportunity to do so. Because women leaders have to: (1) spend extra time and energy to prove that they can lead, and

(2) constantly monitor stereotypic expectations, and still they ultimately end up working harder than their male counterparts to prove that they possess the same level of competence (Kanter, 1997).

Women leaders are exposed to greater competency standards than men leaders. Further on the top of doing their job the women have to:

- 1) Prove that they can lead, over and over again.
- 2) Constantly manage stereotypical expectations (e.g., too tough-too soft).

Women also tend to receive lower rewards for the same level of effort and competency as compared to males.

Because of these greater standards, women also tend to receive lower rewards for the same level of effort and competency as compared to males. In sum, stereotypes create a predicament where women are subject to a high standard of competency and receive lower rewards for the same levels of competency as compared to their men counterparts. But they do not only influence perceptions of leaders' competence but also the perceptions of leaders' likability.

Predicament 3 Competent but Disliked: Women leaders are perceived as competent or likable but rarely both.

This third dilemma swings attention to how leaders are seen interpersonally. Thus far, we have exemplified how

women leaders' behaviors are perceived in case of "extreme perceptions" and how women leaders are treated less favorably in comparison to equally qualified men. The body of research suggests that being liked has significant consequences not only for leaders but also for followers. Individuals or followers do not trust or follow the directions of a less liked leader which in turn has an impact on the effectiveness of a leader as he or she may be constantly engaged in managing these conflicting relationships. So in the end we can conclude that these stereotypic biases make it difficult especially for women leaders to be valued for their leadership and interpersonal style (Steele 1997; Aronson, Quinn & Spencer, 1998). These perceptions render it difficult for women leaders to make a choice between being competent or being liked by colleagues and followers where both components are essential to lead.

Promotional Paradox

It is as simple as day that women are equally capable in terms of skills and talent to lead, yet occupy fewer job slots. Women are considered to be less aggressive than their men counterparts in moving up to ask for those big jobs which they want. But unfortunately it has led many of us to wonder if this struggle for career equality is truly worth it. The result is that the pool of competent and well qualified female candidates in the race for top jobs is getting smaller because the best women leave their jobs in order to raise families or are forced to pursue part time work (Flynn, Heath & Holt, 2013).

Okolo (1989) shared through his work that the lack of role models for women at executive positions is one of the reasons and this is due to their rare presence in top managerial positions. Likewise, in his study he found out that there is no gender difference in organizational hierarchies if a woman has already managed an access to them. The lack of influence in women is because the women occupying executive and managerial positions have developed their survival features by becoming immune to the effects of men's hierarchies.

Sederer & Seidenberg (1976) have addressed genre separation of women sustaining to that woman occupying managerial positions tend to concentrate in certain sectors of economy only, which is reflected in the varied pattern of occupational segregation. It has been seen that in large corporations, if ever a woman gets up to a top position, it is generally in non-strategic areas and their movement towards more strategic areas within the organization is difficult. This organizational barrier is sometimes called "glass ceiling".

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Skinner and Pocock (2008) have investigated the relationship between work overload, work schedule control, work hours and their fit with preferences and work-life conflict among full-time em-

ployees (N=887). It was found that a strong association is demonstrated by work overload, followed by work schedule control, work hours and work hours fit with work-life conflict. It called for effective management of work overload as it would help in addressing work life conflicts and further time-based work life policies, procedures and interventions will support a healthy work-life relationship.

Sophia (2011) investigated the challenges that women face in career development in Kapsabet Municipality, Kenya. She found that majority of the women employees were dissatisfied with career development programs and were discriminated against the career development opportunities. She recommended that organizations are required to strive hard to ensure that career development programs that were set in organizations enhance career development amongst women employees. Top management commitment and introduction of affirmative action must be done so that the problem of women career development is addressed urgently.

Wentling (2003) has shown that the dual role of women is the cause of tension and conflict as her social image is very dominant. Further, in her study on working women in Delhi, she has shown that traditional authoritarian set up of Hindu social structure is continued from ages and hence is creating problem of role conflict for the women but this can be improved by changing the attitude of men and women according to the situation which will help to overcome their problems.

Buddhapriya (2009) points out some of the significant reasons that restrict the women to move upward in organizational hierarchies, viz, stereotyping and perceptions of roles and abilities of women, commitment to family responsibilities, exclusion of women professionals from informal networks, lack of significant general or line experience, lack of mentoring and lack of gender-sensitive policies by the employer. Mercer Survey (2011) conducted a research collecting responses from 1800 human resource, talent management and diversity leaders in order to identify the obstacles which women managers face in becoming successful. It has been observed that many multinational organizations value gender diversity in leadership but they are focused on broader objectives of diversity rather than specifically focusing on accelerating the development of qualified women leaders. As a result in the absence of a clearly defined strategy, the climate of support for developing women leaders is mixed. The survey identified factors (Table 1) that prevent women from advancing to the next level and put them in a promotional dilemma.

Leadership in global business is about creating and sustaining risk taking and innovation, and releasing new ideas and fresh approaches which can drive business results. Further, it was cited that the lack of executive sponsors and an insufficient breadth of experience are top factors that stop women from advancing to the next level in their organization's leadership talent pool. This calls for an investigation of how executive sponsorship helps to drive career advancement, and what benchmarks are required to make it work effectively. It requires to answer whether it is necessary,

Table 1 Factors of Promotional Paradox

Factors	Percentage of respondents
Insufficient depth of experience	18.9
Insufficient of breadth of experience	28.8
Lack of global experience	17.5
Lack of executive leadership potential	19.2
Lack of executive sponsor	41.5
Lack of mentor	21.2
Limited social network and connections	18.1
Willingness to relocate	25.9
Work-life balance	42
Ambition	13.9
Confidence	17.2
Resilience	7.4
Decision making ability	7.1

Source: Human Capital Media Advisory Group and Mercer, (June 21, 2011)

for example, for an executive sponsor or mentor to have had diversity training and specific capabilities so that they can effectively mentor women executives? What must women bring to the task of partnering with male executives in terms of shared vision and career growth? Further, there are some real development challenges ahead for women. Survey respondents cited women’s “struggle to be able to relocate or work on a long-term global assignment due to spouse work commitments and inability to travel.” Others said there was not enough recognition of the need for targeted development, noting a lack of leadership support, while still others opined that “Women don’t ask for the promotion. Men do and get it, whereas women wait to be recognized for all their hard work, and it never comes.”

Social Identity Theory

In this we review a family of social psychological theories, most particularly Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Self-

Categorization Theory (SCT) which together organize what is called the Social Identity Approach. These theories surround around the way how people define themselves as members of a social group – the meaning of the term ‘social identity’. Conceptually, this approach aims to transform the understanding of identity in psychology. It stresses the sociality of the construct in at least three ways. First, social identity is a relational term defining who we are as a function of our similarities and differences with others. Second, social identity is shared with others and provides a basis for shared social action. Third, the meanings associated with any social identity are products of our collective history and present. Social identity is therefore something that links us to the social world. It provides the axis between the individual and society.

The richness of the theory can be drawn from the overall framework which is developed in ways that ignores or con-

tradicts its initial premises. The social identity approach pursues to address how psychological processes interact with social and political processes in order to explain human social behavior.

It is said that: (a) social identification is a perception of oneness with a group of persons; (b) social identification stems from the categorization of individuals, the distinctiveness and prestige of the group, the salience of outgroups, and the factors that traditionally are associated with group formation; and (c) social identification leads to activities that are consistent with the identity, support for institutions that embody the identity, stereotypical perceptions of self and others, and outcomes that traditionally are associated with group formation, and it reinforces the antecedents of identification. According to SIT, people tend to classify themselves and others into various social categories such as organizational membership, religious association, gender, and age group (Tajfel & Turner, 1985).

Stereotype Threat

Stereotype threat refers to situations in which individuals feel they might be judged negatively because of a stereotype. Women, for example, might experience stereotype threat when they complete a mathematics task—a task that some people assume is completed more effectively by men. Stereotype threat has been shown, in many contexts, to compromise performance, evoke anxiety, and deplete effort (e.g., Steele, 1997; Steele & Aronson, 1995; Steele, Spencer & Aronson, 2002; Schmader, Johns & Forbes, 2008).

Stereotype threat evokes concerns of individuals about themselves.

Social identity threat represents instances in which individuals feel the collectives to which they belong have been evaluated negatively. In short, as social identity theory assumes (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), individuals strive to maintain a positive perception of their groups and collectives. If these positive perceptions are challenged, individuals experience a sense of threat, manifesting as negative emotions or reinforcing behaviors that align with group norms (Walton & Cohen, 2007). Some scholars argue that stereotype threat is a subset of social identity threat. In particular, stereotype threat evokes concerns of individuals about themselves. In contrast, social identity threat also evokes concerns in individuals about their perceptions of their groups and collectives (Derks, Inzlicht & Kang, 2008).

Work Performance

Stereotype threat research has examined how activating culturally shared negative stereotypes reduces the performance of stereotyped group members (e.g., Steele & Aronson, 1995). The main thrust of this work shows that making people aware, either blatantly or subtly, of negative stereotypes relevant to a social group to which they belong impairs individuals' performance in the stereotyped domain (Steele, 1997; Steele, Spencer & Aronson, 2002).

Typically, stereotype threat increases the likelihood that men and women will

not perform well in tasks in which they are often assumed to be deficient. If women are reminded of the stereotype that females are deficient in mathematics, their performance on mathematics tasks diminishes (e.g., Krendl, Richeson, Kelley & Heatherton, 2008). If men are reminded of the stereotype that males are deficient in verbal skills, their performance on activities that demand these skills deteriorates as well (Ford, Ferguson, Brooks & Hagadone, 2004).

Although often studied in the context of gender stereotypes, this form of threat has been examined in many other domains as well. When White participants are reminded of the stereotype that Black individuals are superior in athletic activities, their performance on these tasks diminishes (e.g. Beilock, Jellison, Rydell, McConnell & Carr, 2006; Stone, Lynch, Sjomeling & Darley, 1999). Many studies have shown that stereotype threats can impede performance on various tasks. Potentially, stereotype threat might evoke worries, and these worries could impede the capacity of women to update the contents of working memory.

The fundamental postulate of this model is that people typically view themselves positively and want to maintain this view of the self. Because of the drive to maintain the positivity and integrity of the self, what happens when people encounter a stereotype about a group they belong to that is negative—especially given that one’s sense of self is in part determined by group membership, stereotype threat stems from cognitive imbalance that occurs when people’s positive sense

of self is inconsistent with the expectation that a social group to which they identify should fail in a given performance domain. For example, most women view themselves as capable, competent, and able to achieve. However, there is a pervasive stereotype that women are bad at math (e.g., Beilock, 2008; Beilock et al., 2007; Spencer et al., 1999).

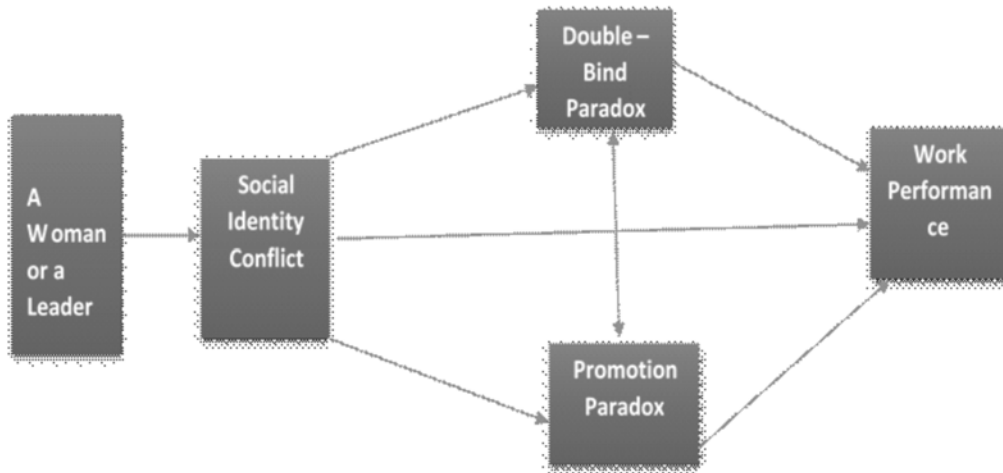
Although these experiments suggest a reason for why women do not occupy as many managerial roles as men, few studies to date have explicitly addressed work related tasks for managerial roles. A notable exception is the one by Bergeron, Block, and Echtenkamp (2006). They investigated the effect of stereotype threat on men and women’s performance on a managerial in-basket exercise. Specifically, graduate students were asked to complete a decision-making activity in the field of human resource management after they were provided with information on their successful predecessor. Their successor was described using either stereotypically masculine or feminine descriptors. Bergeron et al (2006) hypothesized that exposing female participants to masculine descriptors elicits a stereotype threat, which in turn leads to lower levels of performance, both in terms of the quantity of memos to which the participants were able to respond, and the quality of their responses in the in-basket exercise.

Exposing female participants to masculine descriptors elicits a stereotype threat, which in turn leads to lower levels of performance.

The results showed that women in the masculine sex-typed condition underperformed in terms of both quality and quantity relative to women in the feminine sex-typed condition. Compared to men in the masculine sex-typed condition, women in the same condition underperformed in terms of performance quantity. In terms of quality, men and women did not perform differently in the masculine sex-typed condition relative to men and women in the feminine condi-

tion. Surprisingly, both men and women in the masculine sex-typed condition underperformed compared to men and women in the feminine sex-typed condition in terms of performance quality. Although the study conducted by Bergeron et al. (2006) indicates that stereotype threat can negatively impact women in the workplace, additional research is needed to uncover the effect of stereotype threat in other non-gender specific, work-related domains.

Fig. 1 Conceptual Framework



Conclusion

It is observed that in India regardless of growth in women’s education and participation in labor force, representation of women in management jobs is significantly low as compared to men. The few women, who have made it to the top, make us believe that there is a workable change in the gender equalities within corporations and businesses, but it does not hold true. A few studies that have been carried out so far provide a very

gloomy outlook about women representation in management jobs in India. Those studies though have tried to understand the reasons behind it yet they do not provide a comprehensive understanding of the barriers that slow down their progress. So the questions why many women in India do not make it to the top needs to be understood and examined in greater depth. In addition those few women who have made it to the top, about whom very little is known, should also be examined in order to recommend

strategies to overcome such barriers. It is therefore, significant to not only to look into the reasons that contribute to such unequal gender representation in organizational leadership but also to recommend strategies for employer and society in order to break these paradoxes which hinder the growth of women professionals.

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