WOMEN LEADERSHIP AND ITS MENTORING ROLE TOWARDS CAREER DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Women leadership has become an important concept because it provides a source of inspiration for other women to come forward. The aim of this qualitative study is to explore the role of women leadership and their role towards the career development of women. The study is an attempt to highlight and uncover the unique role of women leadership for women, societies, organizations of a developing country. For this research, semi-structured interviews were selected. From these interviews, nine themes emerged: career support, cultural barriers, developing skills, education and hardwork, family related issues, importance of mentoring, influence on others, social issues and stereotypical role of the women. The findings of this study revealed that women leadership and mentoring play a very important role in the career development of women. It is the need of time to deal with all these issues and utilize the competencies of working women effectively in uplifting the economy and growth of the country.

Keywords: Women leadership, career development, role of mentoring.

JEL Classification: Z 000

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649 PAKISTAN BUSINESS REVIEW OCT 2017
Introduction

During the last few decades, organizations are focusing on utilizing female leaders’ traits for their benefits. These specific feminine characteristics are social interaction, communication style, social skills, acceptance of difference and ability to work in groups (Lahti, 2013). Women constitute twenty four percent of senior management post globally of which China is at top with fifty one percent women working as senior managers Japan is at the lowest with only seven percent female senior managers. One of the major reasons for this lowest ratio of female managers in a developed country like Japan is patriarchal and masculine culture, and the same situation with the Pakistan where despite being more than fifty percent of the population of Pakistan women are still far behind to contribute in the development of country. Currently women are outperforming men in education and also proving capable of work at any position.

Women who are working on top designations have been proven effective mentors for other women acting as role models, influencing their career advancement and retentions at job place (Kanter, 1977; Noe, 1988; Ibarra, 1993). A large share of female employees in an organization even at managerial position indicates the hospitable environment that encourages highly qualified women to join and work in that particular organization. It is also difficult to understand the challenges faced by female leaders in developing countries (Grant, 2009). Because the role of women is considered to remain at home taking the responsibility of caring for the children and home, whereas the responsibility of male member is to support the family financially (Lahti, 2013).

According to Rosener (1990), men and women leadership have some differences and also some unexpected similarities. Further the concept of mentoring and women was introduced in 1970 (Broadbridge and Ehrich, 2008). Many researchers focused on the issues related to mentoring faced by the women on top positions (Maxwell, 2009; Kim, 2007), the most common issue was of mixing gender mentoring (Gudmundsson et al., 2007; Smith et al., 2012). A lot of studies related to leadership have been reported but still there is deficiency in previous literature that it did not discuss the women leadership role and women mentoring in the context of career.
Research

Women Leadership and Its Mentoring

devlopment perspective (Lahti, 2013; Simmons, 2011). This research is valuable in this context that it explores and signifies the women leadership and mentoring role in the career development of the women, Moreover, conducting the study in Pakistan makes it unique due to its diverse culture. The aim of the study is to explore the women leadership and mentoring role in the career development of women in Pakistan.

Literature Review

Women Leadership

Women leadership is a unique concept, and it is difficult to explain the challenges faced by female leaders (Grant, 2009). To develop understanding regarding the differences between the women and men leadership is complex in nature, but to introduce the women leadership style separately is the requirement of the modern era. Many studies have identified the difference in leadership of women and men and also explored their leadership, impact and role in development (Boyce et al., 2010; Beeson and Valerio, 2012). According to Burke and Collins (2001) there is no clear information regarding the difference in men and women leadership. Clarke (2011) stated that the “women leadership development” is not related to the other leadership development programs, it is rather related to the training and development of women and their coaching system. Further the leadership theories related to the women leadership are social learning theory, transformational theory, and cognitive theory. Social theory basically explained the gender’s identity, perception of people how they sense the men and women (Geis et al., 1983).

Leadership is a wide concept and women leadership is also one branch of this broader concept. Researchers have defined the concept of women in their own ways, some defined in the context of leadership that “women can be a leaders” and some defined in the context of “feminist” that is related to the equality of male and female (Palmu-Joronen 2009). Lahti (2013) described that there is no difference between the male and female leadership. The leadership style that is associated with the women is transformational leadership style and many researchers have discussed this in broader context (Rasool, Arfeen, Mothi, & Aslam, 2015). This style is most commonly adopted by the organizations. The transformational style provides direction to their subordinates, to influence them and have a good collaboration
between the leaders and their subordinates in order to achieve the higher level of goals (Rasool et al., 2015; Imran, Ilyas, Aslam, & Rahman, 2016).

Leadership style is a complete package that directs the clear vision and provides the plan and strategies to achieve the expected challenges (Rasool et al., 2015; House, 1996; Imran et al., 2016; Aslam et al., 2016). Based on the literature, women mostly prefer team work, and having the ability to provide support to the others, further they have believed on instructional leadership (Dougherty and Sobehart, 2009). Women having the leadership position effectively manage all the rules and gives the outstanding performance (Eagly and Johannesen Schmidt, 2001). Franzén (2005) stated that the leadership style associated with the females is “Participative and Collaborative leadership” style. Oplatka (2006) stated that women in developing countries mostly have the androgynous leadership style. Leadership is a debatable topic, and to adopt the masculine characteristic, because developing countries like Pakistan, has the male dominating culture (Rasool et al., 2015; Aslam et al., 2016). Therefore, it is necessary to adopt such characteristics in order to have influence on their followers (Aslam et al., 2016).

Mentoring and Women

Mentoring is an interpersonal process of employees, in which they share their experience with the less experienced employees (Ragins and Kram, 2007). Mentoring is helpful for the employees to increase their career performance. Many researchers demonstrated that the employees actively involved in mentoring are more satisfied and confident with their work having good outcomes (Fassinger and Hensler-McGinnis 2005). According to Scandura and Williams (2001) some executives did not share their experience with others employees and some received handsome amount for providing the services of mentors. The concept mentoring and women introduced in 1970 (Broadbridge and Ehrich, 2008). Many researcher focused on the issues related to mentoring faced by the women on top post and the most common issue was of mixing gender mentoring (Campbell and Campbell, 2007; Gudmundsson et al., 2007). Moreover the mentorship basically enhanced the skills and career opportunities for the executive women. Mentoring is further discussed in two parts, formal and
informal. In formal mentoring there are some specific rules which should be followed and in which third part is also involved. Whereas informal mentoring is related to the sharing of views and information with the mutual corporation, in which no other party is involved (Riordan et al., 2005). Walz et al., (1992) stated that there is no difference between the formal and informal mentoring outcomes. There are many intervening variables which exist between the mentoring job satisfaction level and career performance. Further the interpersonal relationship basically determines the mentoring behavior either it is formal or informal.

De-Valle (2014) stated that above 80% reported that they wanted to be mentor, and above 52% required not to have mentor, because the mentoring having direct relationship with the career advancement might have some problems for the women to find mentor. Based on the previous studies it is found that mentoring is a tool for the women career success but no doubt for the women there are many problems for the women to find mentor (Fassinger and Hensler-McGinnis 2005; Riordan et al., 2005). Based on the previous literature it is stated that for the improvement in career, mentoring is an important element for the women. But women faced discrimination because of their gender and sometimes do not received any support because of certain disabilities.

Career Development

Gottfredson and Becker (1981) also introduced a theory related to career development termed as self-concept. According to him every person can choose a career on the basis of his/her own competencies and self-image. Further this self-concept is affected by the social environment and cognitive development. Farmer (1985) introduced a model related to career development that consisted of three components related to the motivational factors such as “personal and environmental factors, mastery and career commitment. These early theories related to the career development were for men because at that time mostly men were engaged in paid work (Astin, 1984). The women career development and progressiveness is basically based on the theory of “Bandura’s social learning theory” In this theory they explained that self-efficacy is involved in women’s career related to planning and decisions. Women are lacking to fully utilize their
capabilities and skills. Belenky's (1986) introduced a theory named “Relational theory” that focused on the relationship of women and their impact on the career related decision. He suggested that the women choice of career basically lead them to a safe career and relationship. It provide them support and encouragement to take the best and meaningful decision. Therefore women relationship has strong influence on their career choices.

Proposition 1: Women leadership is positively linked to the career development of women.

Proposition 2: Mentoring is positively associated with the career development

Methodology

The study is based on interpretivism paradigm which is related to the qualitative, and the qualitative approach is exploratory and explanatory in nature. The qualitative approach which is used in this study is inductive in nature as derived from the experience of the others. Exploratory research design is used in this qualitative study. The main purpose of exploratory research design is to explore the problem related to the situation and also develop new ideas (Zikmund, 2000).

Population and Sample

The population of this study is the successful working women who have the bright career having a good position in the organizations/institutions. The women, who do not have managerial experience and are not more than 30, are not included in this study.

The sampling strategy which is used in this study is purposive sampling. It is a technique that provides detailed and important information (Bryman, 2012; Miles and Huber, 1994). Pattern (2002) stated that “the main logic to select the purposive sampling is
to select and collect the in-depth information and the rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about the issues of central important to the purpose of inquiry”.

After deciding the purposive sampling technique the next important consideration is to select the accurate sample size (Aslam, Arfeen, Mohti, & Rahman, 2015). Morse (2000) supports the sample of 6 to 10 participants in the qualitative studies. In this study the sample size consists of 10 females at managerial positions. The sample should accurate and also present the exact information related to the topic (Aslam et al., 2015).

Procedure

Data was collected to the working women having a good position in the organization and a successful career. For the data collection 10 women were selected. In this qualitative research the interview protocol is used to collect the data (Bryman et al., 2012; Creswell, 2012). According to the Bryman et al., (2012) there are two types of interviews one is structured and the other one is semi-structured. For this research the semi-structured interview was selected.

The data collection process takes four weeks approximately. Before the interview the researcher shares the interview protocol related information with the participants, and the interviews are recorded in audio form and written notes were also taken simultaneously. All the interviews were conducted in English language.

Data Analysis

After the data collection, all the interviews are transcribed. The main purpose of transcription is to provide the accurate description of participants. Serovich et al., (2005) stated that “transcription is a technique of data presentation, and this presentation can affect how data is conceptualized”. After the transcription of interviews the data is thematically analyzed by using QSR NVivo 11 software.

Qualitative Data Analysis

After the thematic analysis the nine main themes have been identified. These themes are named as a) Career support; B) Cultural
barriers; C) Developing skills; D) Education and hardworking; E) Family related issues; F) Importance of mentoring; G) Influence on others; H) Social issues; I) Stereotypical role of the women. These themes have been reported in the Table 1.1

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The above table mentions the themes which emerged after the thematic analysis and their frequencies. According to this table, the theme with the highest frequency is family related issues with the frequency of 31, which shows that this theme has been discussed mostly by the participants and they face these issues during their career development process.

The second highest frequency theme which has been explored after the thematic analysis is social issues. This theme indicates that social issues such as professional jealousy, personal likings and workplace politics are creating hindrance for the women career development. The theme with the third highest frequency, is education and hardworking. This shows that education and hardworking is contributing as a key factor in the career development of the women. The fourth highest frequency themes are developing the skills and cultural barriers. Developing the skills shows that
mentoring role is very important for their career development because mentor is a person who develops the skills related to the career.

The theme “influential ability” frequency is 9, which shows that the women working at top position are basically the inspirational source for the other women to achieve the career goals. The lowest frequency theme is stereotypical role which indicates that in our society some specific roles are associated with the women because such thinking also affects the women career.

*Interpretation of themes*

This section explains the nine main themes, which determine the women leadership and mentoring role towards the women career development.

*Family related issues*

The most highlighted theme of the study is family related issues as it is the core issue faced by the majority of the participants irrespective of their family background or job status. Many of the participants face the hindrances by the family, though very few mention supportive role of their families in their career development. The problems faced by the women are not of the same kind as one of the participants mentioned her problem as below

“I faced too much criticism from the family side”

Participant one faced the criticism from the family side because they did not consider her work load and extra efforts; they always discouraged her efforts by saying that she just wanted to work outside to avoid the household responsibilities. On the other hand the participant 6 stated:

“The major problem that I faced was to keep balance between work and family …because in-laws sometimes creates a lot of problems and issues”

Here the participant 6 faced the problem from the in-laws side because of their rigid mentality and their non-supportive behavior. So because of such behavior she sometime did not focus on her work and also faced problems on job as well.

Majority of participants focused that family related barriers are major hindrances in their career development. Unsupportive behavior of their families badly affects their career and they could not
fully concentrate on their work. Like men, women also require family support for their successful career growth.

Social issues

Good working environment affects positively in the career development, especially of women. Professional jealousy, personal likings, workplace politics are the common issues faced by the both men and women but in addition to that women also have to bear some other stigmas including gender discrimination, discouraging attitude by the seniors and disrespect by the juniors.

As participant 2 referred as
“The working environment sometimes was not suitable for them, as they did not feel comfortable with the others because of professional jealousy”

Participant 6 also highlighted the
“Jealousy factors and workplace politics”

And Participant 9 said that
“Working environment not suitable for the women because majority of the organizations employees are male. They did not give respect to the women, not easily accepting the women authority as well”

According to the majority of the participants’ workplace environment, jealousy factors and favoritism are the major problems faced by the women. Mostly women left their career because of such issues. So all these pose a great threat to the career development of women, having a negative impact on their professional grooming.

Education and hardworking

All the participants mentioned education as a key factor in their career development. Consistent hard work along with the determination helped them to achieve their professional objectives. Participant 5 mentioned it as

“For the career advancement hardworking and qualification is required. It is a step by step process where consistency is required for the success.”
Participant 1 stated that
“Without hardworking and continuity you cannot achieve your main targets and goals. So for the purpose of success I improved my qualification and still working on it”

Participant 3 referred it as
“I think there are multiple factors that enhance your career the most, in which the most important factor is the personal abilities of a person such as good and professional skills, intellectual abilities and most important the working”

It has already been mentioned that education plays a very important role for the career progressiveness and the participants who are working on top positions. They stated that they are here just because of their qualification and hardworking. They also considered that without education it might not be possible for them to achieve their career goals and success.

Developing the skills

Mentoring the employees through professional guidance and motivating them for acquisition of new skills needed for their progress, plays an important role in the career development of women.

As participant 1 stated that
“He guides me regarding the culture of environment and the tactics how to deal with the people and how to work. And one thing more that I was not too good at was developing good relationship with others, but my mentor helped me regarding this issue”

Participant 3 mentioned as
“My mentor guides me in a friendly way and helps me proving myself hardworking, professional, sensible and effective for the company”

As participants mentioned in their interviews mentoring role is very important for their career development because mentor is a person who makes you familiar with all the organizational matters and also develops the skills to deal with others, how to communicate and how to perform the official responsibilities. Sometime mentor also
develops the specific skills that are the requirement of the job. Such as participant 5 mentioned in her interviews that “My mentor provides me some specialist skills, analytic ability and he also teaches me how to interact with the other people in the organization, and how to make and create good environment in the organization”

Cultural Barriers

The status of Pakistani women is deeply embedded in traditional values and cultural beliefs and it constrains the working ability of the women. It is also a major barrier in their career progress, though the situation is changing rapidly in lieu of globalization. Participant 7 said that “I think it’s true as this scenario still prevails in our society, especially for individuals not belonging from the big cities like Lahore, Karachi and Islamabad etc. As per my experience, yes I do face these things. When getting an opportunity to study abroad at scholarship, my family did not allow because I am a girl”

And participant 5 stated that “In our culture men have the more opportunities to enhance their career while female not having such support faces a lot of hurdles from the society sides and family as well”

As some participants mentioned that they faced the cultural barriers during their career development process, while some referred that now times have changed and culture is supportive for the women. Because of the cultural support now women are not only working for their families but also contributing in the progress of the country as well.

As participant 3 mentioned “No I don’t think so as time have changed and women are also getting good position, achieving a lot of success in their career. In my case my family especially my husband supports me throughout my career. According to my life time experience family support plays a major role in developing the career”
Career support

Career counseling during the education and job orientation given in the beginning are important factors that help the women to work smoothly at their job place.

Participant 3 stated that
“A mentor helps us to move with maturity and my mentor is my teacher and my parents.

They guide me and also provide me direction how to work with the people”

The role of mentoring throughout the career development plays a very important role. Because of proper guideline and counseling every person can affectively perform in the organization. Most of the participants mentioned that in the beginning of their career they got support from their parents, teachers and seniors.

Importance of mentoring

The role of proper mentorship is unavoidable in regard to career development, because a lack of good mentorship may badly affect the employees’ career.

“A good mentor gives tips and good approaches regarding the career. More specifically for the women a mentor provides the right direction. And in some cases female mentor guide in more professional way rather than a male mentor as I experienced throughout my career” (participant 1)

To enhance the career, the role of mentoring is most important. A mentor is a person who basically provides the foundation in the start of the career. For the women career, there is a need of a good mentoring relationship where women feel comfortable and easily develop the required skills.

Influence others

Influential role by the women at top positions cannot be underestimated because women at junior positions get motivation from their seniors and they can understand the ways better to achieve the career related goals. As participant 2 mentioned that
“Art of leading and motivating people to get things done they seems to be impossible for them”

Participant 3 stated that
“The person having the ability to motivate others provides the direction towards their goals”

Women at leadership positions play an influential role for the other working women; the other women can get inspiration and motivation from the successful and highly professional women. They learn from their experiences how to excel in their career development stage.

Stereotypical Role
Stereotypical role of the women, considered as the primary care giver of the family, have a negative impact on their professional career.

Participant 1 referred as
“Male naturally has the capacity and ability to manage the outdoor work more affectively, and female are naturally weak compared to male”

According to the participant one woman is weak compared to the man that’s why they face challenges when they get involved in outdoor activities. While some participants stated that in our society some stereotypical roles are associated with the females that badly affect the career of the women.

On the other hand some participant stated that now time has changed so women are not only stuck with their household responsibilities, they are also focusing on their career development. As participant 3 stated that

“No, it is not necessary to assign the outdoor work to men only; a woman can also take her team in streamline direction. Women having the ability to perform the multiple tasks, based on my personal experience, can easily handle the situation compared to men”
Concept Map

The concept map of this study is as under

Here in figure 1.2 shows the themes that emerged after the thematic analysis. Women leadership associated themes are cultural barriers, stereotypical role, influence on others, family related issues. Career development associated themes are education and hardworking and social issues. And women mentoring themes are career support, developing skills and importance of mentor. The arrows basically show the relationship within the themes and also explain how the themes are related to each other.

Conclusion

This study highlights the influential role of women at leadership positions having the potential of mentoring in the context of uplifting the career of working women. The findings of this qualitative study revealed that women leadership and mentoring role play very important roles in the career development of women. But in Pakistan women face some other hurdles regarding the career development such as family related issues, social and cultural barriers. Now it is the need of the hour to deal with all these issues in the
society and utilize their competencies and letting them play their role effectively in uplifting the economy and growth of the country.

**Limitations and Recommendations**

In this study there is an issue of generalizability due to small sample size (Aslam *et al.*, 2015), as the data was collected from ten working women only. In future increasing the sample size may affect the results of the study. Furthermore, quantitative study done in this issue may positively support the results obtained in this research which is a qualitative research.

**Implications**

Information provided in this study will enable us to recognize the unique role of women leadership in the development of career of other women. Also this study provides insight into the ways in which women leaders can serve as role models for their junior colleagues. In Pakistan women mentorship is still in the progressive phase so this study provides basis for encouraging the mentoring role of women in developing countries like Pakistan.

Many of the studies carried out in this context are done in developed countries; their findings may not correlate well with the situation in the developing countries especially in Pakistan due to cultural barriers. Therefore this study also provides comparison between the developed and the developing countries. This study will help the policy makers to establish the role of women working at leadership position in the career development of other women and also aid them in making policies that will encourage female mentorship practices in private and public sector organizations.
Research

Women Leadership and Its Mentoring

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