



WOMEN LEADERSHIP IN CORPORATE SECTOR; A ANALYSIS OF INDIAN CONTEXT

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Abstract

Indian women, have come up a long way during the past 50 years. Gone are the days when the leadership positions were occupied by males. Now in almost every field women are equally occupying the seats and who have silently begun challenging the conventional male ideas that had shaped the policies earlier. Women have advanced considerably in academic front but like every coin, this story too, has two sides. In spite of the considerable gain in equity of status, women in research and academic careers still face innumerable barriers to their careers. This study was conducted with an aim to highlight the paradox in public attitude towards women as a leader. This is a applied study in which the subjects are women in leadership positions. The comparison between the men and women leaders with respect to Leadership traits, performance, policy matter etc. was made.

Keywords: Empowerment, *Leadership, Public Attitude, and Performance Skills.*

Introduction

India is a country of great leaders, both men and women. The women leaders in India are diverse in terms of their personality, and their contribution to education, politics, women empowerment and social welfare is neither limited nor forgettable. Today, it's all about empowerment of women. A woman is the flag bearer of a society. It is she who gives birth to the future of the world. She is responsible for rearing her children and giving them an opportunity to grow up in a healthy and positive environment. Women are doing leadership role throughout their lives. When it comes to leadership does gender matters? Twenty-five years after women first started driving into the labor force and trying to be more like men in every way, from wearing power suits to picking up golf clubs.

When women, who have traditionally been denied a voice in decision-making, come to power, they transform the development agenda toward the human component - focusing on health, nutrition, education, water, sanitation and better family income. They tackle long-ignored problems such as domestic violence, alcoholism and corruption.

According to a survey done by Economic times, there are only 16 women on the board of directors of the 30 sensex companies, or only 4.8% of the 335 people who hold directorship positions. In the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE) 100 companies, which throws up 923 directors, only 50 (or 5.4%) are women, while companies in the BSE 500 index have only 192 women (or 5.3%) out of 3650 persons holding directorship positions. According to Poonam Barua, founder chairperson of the Forum for women in Leadership, India's 500 million strong female populations does not find representation in even 10% of the managerial posts across companies. Today it is about calibrating how many of women are in the key leadership roles. There it looks like India has still some way to go. An increasing number of companies are striving to enhance women representation in their workforce, but they may not be enough.

According to Catalyst India Benchmarking report for 2010, only 17% of Indian companies offered target leadership development program for women. Another study for women in leadership (WILL) Forum shows that Indian companies have much lower women representation in senior position compared with Multinational Firms. While Indian companies such as Tata Consultancies Ltd. , Zensar Technologies, Tata Steel and JSW Steel. Had 5-6% women in senior positions, multinationals such as PepsiCo. KPMG, Citigroup, GE, and Pfizer had 15-20% women at the same level in 2010, the WLL study shows.

During the same period Indian Banks like Axis bank had 21% women participation in its total workforce. In comparison American Express in India had 43% women representation in its total staff strength of 5500. The study also shows that 84% of Indian subsidiaries of multinationals have adopted women's advancement strategy, compared with only 37% of India headquartered companies.

Some Facts And Figures about the Women Employees at Leadership Role

Companies in the Asia Pacific Region are clueless about giving their women employees more leadership roles, a new Mercer survey on Women's Leadership Development shows, about 15% of the respondents were from Indian organizations. Clearly, it's not enough to have the wherewithal; companies must adopt a philosophy encouraging talented women to lead from front.



Near about 73% companies don't have a strategy for developing women in leadership roles.

- 42% companies do not offer activities targeted to the needs of women leaders.
- 23% companies offer some activities or programs for women.
- 9% companies are planning to add programmes and activities in the future.
- 20% companies are very concerned about retaining women in leadership role.
- 81% companies want to help women develop the full range of skills for senior leadership roles.

Many of the respondents believe women have the right stuff to be leaders. When it comes to honesty, intelligence and a handful of other character traits they value highly in women leaders, the public rates women superior to men, according to the survey conducted.

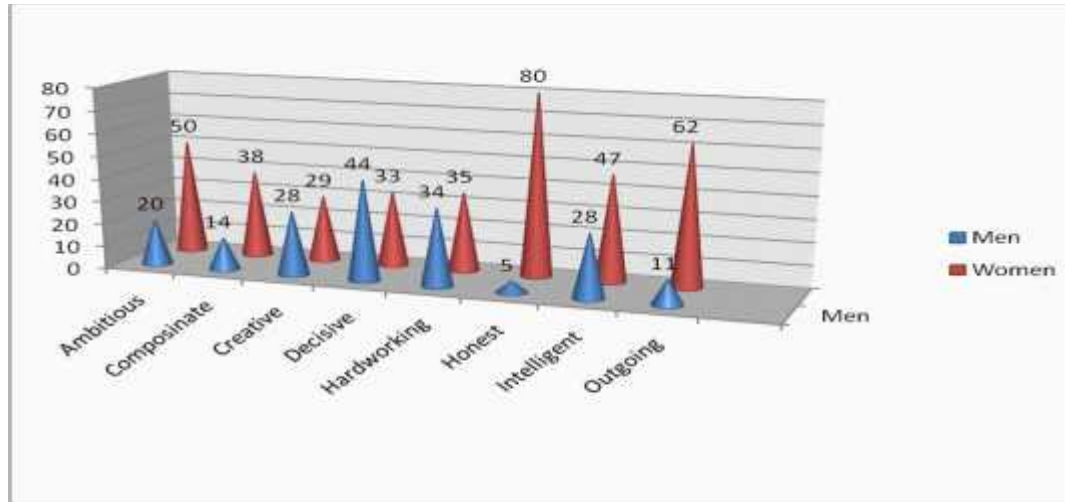


Figure 1

Nevertheless, a mere 6% of respondents in this survey of 2,250 adults say that, overall, women make better leaders than men. About one-in-five (21%) say men make the better leaders, while the vast majority -- 69% -- says men and women make equally good leaders. The paradox embedded in these survey findings is part of a wider paradox in modern society on the subject of gender and leadership. In an era when women have made comprehensive steps in educational attainment and workforce participation, relatively few have made the journey all the way to the highest levels of political or corporate leadership.

In the survey, the public mentioned gender discrimination, resistance to change, and a self-serving "old boys club" as reasons for the relative scarcity of women at the top. In somewhat smaller numbers, respondents also said that women's family responsibilities and their shortage of experience hold them back from the upper ranks of business.

What the public does not state is that women inherently lack what it takes to be leaders. On the contrary, on seven of eight leadership traits measured in this survey, the public rates women either better than or equal to men. For example, half of all adults said women are more honest than men, while just one-in-five said men are more honest (the rest said they don't know or volunteer the opinion that there's no difference between the sexes on this trait). And honesty, according to respondents, is the most important to leadership of any of the traits measured in the survey. The next most important leadership trait, in the public's view, is intelligence. Here again, women outperform men: 38% of respondents said women are smarter than men, while just 14% said men are smarter, and the remainder said there's no difference between the sexes.

Following are the Key Strengths of Indian Women as Leaders;

- Ability to network with colleagues
- Ability to perceive and understand situations
- Strong sense of dedication, loyalty and commitment to their organizations
- Ability to multitask
- Collaborative work style—solicit input from others, with respect for ideas
- Crisis management skills
- Willingness to share information (interactive leadership style)
- Sensitivity in relationships (e.g., compassionate, empathetic, understanding)
- Behaving in a gender-neutral manner

(Source: Adapted from Budhwar, P. S., Saini, D. S., & Bhatnagar, J. (2005, June). Women in management in the new economic environment: The case of India. *Asia Pacific Business Review*, 11(2), 179-193)



Significant change in the workplace will take time. Transformation in the Indian context for women in management can happen through policy and regulations that promote gender diversity and quality contact. Change can occur through the collective will to change the mindset of people to overcome gender differences at the educational and organizational levels.

Research Studies

A positive progress for women in the Indian management space as well as barriers to their progress is being documented by many research organizations. Research shows that the economic development of India has been positively influenced by entrepreneurial enterprises. Further, entrepreneurship has provided women in India the opportunity to enter social and political circles previously closed to them. Family background and support play an important role to achieve independence and move above the confines of a male-dominated traditional society. For most women entrepreneurs, financial stability in the household and family support is critical for their success.

“A supportive family, both before and after marriage, is a key factor for Indian professional women to succeed.”.

However, women in management face challenges due to stereotyping. Implications for Organizations note that stereotypes and perceptions of Indian women in the workplace appear to have had a significant negative impact on the position of women leaders. This study suggests Indian women are viewed as working in PR, HR and administrative positions at low to junior levels, and in fields such as fashion and beauty. Women in Indian organizations felt that such stereotypes result from not being given challenging assignments. Yet, male leaders saw women as being treated more leniently than men when making mistakes. A Glimpse explored existing gender stereotypes in corporate India. According to this research, Indian men leaders held similar managerial gender stereotypes as found in earlier Western studies. That is, they associate managerial success with men more than with women (think manager—think male). In contrast, Indian women managers did not project gender stereotypes on managerial positions.

A 2005 study of senior women in public and private sector firms, titled *Women in Management in the New Economic Environment: The Case of India*, found that women look for work from economic necessity and for personal goals. Women in lower to middle socioeconomic status seek income opportunities, and those in the upper middle class pursue a career for professional ambitions. Women with higher education have more interest in independence, are career-oriented and interested in quickly moving up the organizational ladder. The key challenge for women managers is managing both their traditional role as housewives and their career. Women experience great pressure to work hard to prove themselves in the workplace, and one of the greatest obstacles is how women leaders are treated by men. They often receive differential treatment, reinforcing the stereotypical view of being inferior and less important than men, resulting in not being offered challenging jobs and not being part of important organizational issues. Yet, despite social and attitudinal barriers, Indian women have gained some equality. Indian organizations are beginning to realize that women can do the same work as men, although in some cases, they have different needs.

When it comes to hiring practices, most men and women leaders see employment as based on merit, not gender (90% men and 79% women), but only about one-third think that organizations look for ways to increase the number of women in senior management roles. In terms of organizational perceptions of importance of gender issues, overall, Indian organizations lack sensitivity about these issues and under appreciate women’s capabilities and talents. It was also found during the survey that as far as the management skills and leadership styles are concerned generally men tend to want women to act like men, and most men are not comfortable working for a woman leader. Overall, women prefer an interactive style, and men prefer a command and control style. To be successful in business, women develop management styles that make it more comfortable for men to work with and/or report to a female manager.

Men and women tie on two of the next three traits on the public's ranking of leadership qualities measured in this survey -- hard work and ambition. Men prevail over women on decisiveness (their solo "victory" in the series of eight traits), with 44% of respondents saying that men are more decisive and 33% saying women are. Overall, however, women emerge from this survey a bit like a sports team that racks up better statistics but still loses the game - witness the tiny 6% of the public that says women generally make better leaders than men.

To be sure, the fact that such a large majority of respondents (69%) said that women and men make equally good leaders is itself a measure of the profound changes in women's role in society that have taken place over the past several decades. Women make up 57% of all college students, about half of all law and medical school students, and more than four- in-ten



students who earn masters degrees in business. They make up 46% of the total private sector workforce and 38% of all managers.

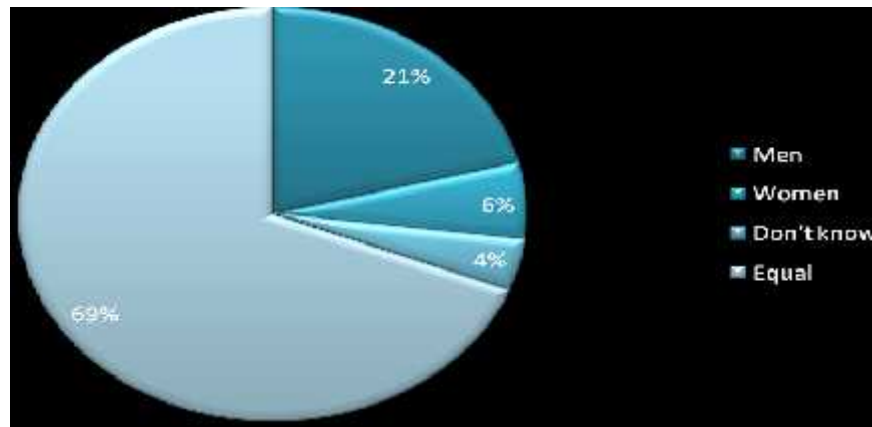
However, it's still lonely for women at the very highest step of the corporate ladder. Women are just 2% of the CEOs of the nation's Fortune 500 companies. In the political realm, they make up

Items	Men	Women
Performance skills		
Working out compromises	16	42
Keeping government honest	10	34
Representing your interests	18	28
Standing up what they believe	16	23
Policy Matters		
Dealing with social issues	7	52
Dealing with crime and public safety	42	12
Dealing with national security & defense	54	7

Finally, women have big leads over men on the last three traits on the public's rankings of the eight items measured: being compassionate (80% say women; 5% say men); being outgoing (47% say women; 28% say men) and being creative (62% say women; 11% say men).

The survey also asked respondents to assess whether men or women in public office are better at handling a range of policy matters and job performance challenges. On the policy front, women are widely judged to be better than men at dealing with social issues such as health care and education, while men have a big edge over women in the public's perception of the way they deal with crime, public safety, defense and national security.

As for job performance skills, women get higher marks than men in all of the measures tested: standing up for one's principles in the face of political pressure; being able to work out compromises; keeping government honest; and representing the interests of "people like us." Overall,



(Source: <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/932/men-or-women-whos-the-better-leader>, last accessed on 21/03/2011)

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Women make up 57% of all college students, about half of all law and medical school students, and more than four-in-ten students who earn masters degrees in business. They make up 46% of the total private sector workforce and 38% of all managers. However, it's still lonely for women at the very highest step of the corporate ladder. Women are just 2% of the CEOs of the nation's Fortune 500 companies. In the political realm, they make up just 17% of all members 16% of all Indian senators; 16% of all governors; and 24% of all state legislators.

Asked what accounts for this slow movement toward gender equivalence in top political positions, about half (51%) of all survey respondents said a major reason is that Indians simply aren't ready to elect a woman to high office; more than four-in-ten (43%) said a major reason is that women who are active in corporate are held back by men, and 38% said a major reason is that women are discriminated against in all realms of society, and corporate is no exception. These are the three most prevalent choices among seven possible explanations presented in the survey.

Attributes	Major Reason	Minor Reason
Many American not ready to elect a women to high office	51	28
Women who are active in party politics get held back by men	43	32
women face discrimination in all areas; politics in no exception	38	33
Women's family responsibilities don't leave time for politics	27	40
Fewer women have the experience for high office	26	37
Generally speaking, women don't make as good leaders as men	16	29
Generally speaking, women don't make as good leaders as men	14	31

Next in the pecking order of explanations is the time pressure that comes with trying to balance work and family; 27% of the public cites this as a major reason there aren't more women leaders in corporate world. Some 26% said that a big reason is that women don't have the experience required for higher positions. The least common explanations - chosen as a major reason by just 16% and 14% of respondents, respectively - are that women don't make as good leaders as men and those women aren't tough enough for corporate world.

Women's Contribution to the Economy

Although most women in India work and contribute to the economy in one form or another, much of their work is not documented or accounted for in official statistics. Women cultivate fields and harvest crops while working on farms, women weave and make handicrafts while working in household industries, women sell food and gather wood while working in the informal sector. Additionally, women are traditionally responsible for the daily household chores (e.g., cooking, fetching water, and looking after children). Since Indian culture hinders women's access to jobs in stores, factories and the public sector, the informal sector is particularly important for women. There are estimates that over 90 percent of workingwomen are involved in the informal sector. The informal sector includes jobs such as domestic servant, small trader, artisan, or field laborer on a family farm. Most of these jobs are unskilled and low paying and do not provide benefits to the worker. More importantly, however, cultural practices vary from region to region. Though it is a broad generalization, North India tends to be more patriarchal and feudal than South India.

Conclusion

Women in northern India have more restrictions placed on their behavior, thereby restricting their access to work. Southern India tends to be more democratic, women have relatively more freedom, and women have a more prominent presence in society. Cultural restrictions however are changing, and women are freer to participate in the formal economy, though the shortage of jobs throughout the country contributes to low female employment. But in the recent years, conditions of working women in India have improved considerably. More and more women find themselves in positions of respect and prestige; more and more workplaces are now populated with women who work on equal terms as men. Working is no longer an adjustment, a mere necessity; but a means to self worth and growth. Women have now not only found their place in work places but are also party to governance. In recent years there have been explicit moves to increase women's corporate and political participation.

Women have been given representation in the Panchayati Raj system as a sign of political empowerment. There are many elected women representatives at the village council level. At the central and state levels too women are progressively



making a difference. Today we have women Chief Ministers in five large states of India. The Women's reservation policy bill is slated to further strengthen political participation.

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