WOMEN'S CAREER ADVANCEMENT IN ORGANISATIONS: INTEGRATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR RESEARCH

Marijana MIŠIĆ ANDRIĆ

Association of Centres for Interdisciplinary and Multidisciplinary Studies and Research - *ACIMSI*, University of Novi Sad, 21000 Novi Sad, Trg Dositeja Obradovića 5, Republic of Serbia
E-mail: mima.misic@gmail.com

Contemporary organisations, caught in the middle of global economic and social crisis, are facing different business challenges, having to respond to quick changes in business environment and demographic changes in workforce composed by increasing number of women. Although the number of women in workforce is on the rise, they are still underrepresented in manager positions, especially higher management. This implies that certain barriers are in place which makes difficult for women to develop their careers, especially in reaching manager positions. The aim of this paper is to analyse and present a theoretical framework for further study of professional carrier advancement for women. The paper especially analyse integrative theoretical framework which stresses the equal importance of researching individual factors (personal influence) and organisational factors (social inclusion), having in mind how the organisational context can improve or deter women's carrier. The paper presents possible directions for future research based on the analysis of the theoretical framework and especially individual and organisational factors.

Key words: women, career, advancement, integrative framework.

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary organisations have faced numerous challenges in the past decades due to globalisation, development of IT technology and recent economic and social crisis. In such environment one of the challenges are changes in workforce demographic structure, especially the rise of number of women in workforce. Today women make up to 63% of total workforce in European Union and yet their participation in managerial positions in business sector is far below these numbers and their progress towards managerial career is still very slow (Senden &Visser, 2014). Comparably, managerial positions in organisations in European Union are still the realm of men: in all business sectors in all 28 countries of European Union men hold 61% to 70% of all managerial positions (Senden &Visser, 2014).

Numerous organisations have tried in the past decade to develop and apply different programs and policies trying to improve the career of women, especially those striving towards managerial positions, focusing on recruitment process, mentorship or flexible work forms (Kottke & Agars, 2005). In addition to initiatives of different organisations in various sectors including governments of different countries to solve the negative trend of unequal representation of women and men in managerial positions through programs and policies the question remains: What are the reasons for underrepresentation of women in managerial positions, especially higher management, what barriers exist and how they prevent women from professional advancement? Numerous scientific studies have looked into this problem and suggested numerous explanations like lack of mentorship (Higgins & Kram, 2001), lack of access to professional and informal networks (Oakley, 2000), gender stereotypes (Oakley, 2000) and private and professional life balance (Rapoport et al., 2002).

The aims of this paper it to analyse and present integrative theoretical framework in studying

Available online at http://www.tfzr.uns.ac.rs/jemc

career development of women focusing on analysis of individual and organisational factors through two dimensions: personal influence and social inclusion. The research of this problem should study these two factors equally: individual characteristics of women that prevent them from achieving professional success and organisational context women face that limits or prevents their career development (Bilimoria et al., 2007). Based on integrative theoretical framework this paper presents implications for future research.

CAREER ADVANCEMENT DYNAMIC OF WOMEN

Before I analyse and present the individual and organisational factors that influence career development of women it is important to first analyse the dynamic how certain factors create specific circumstances that influence career development of women. Women face specific situations and their professional experience is different from men, leading us to three factors that shape and limit women in career development:

1. "Token" status of women[1] and stereotypes about women in general and especially in management which constantly contributes to their underrepresentation in manager positions.
2. Inability of the organisation to adapt their organisational environment and working conditions to help women successfully deal with problem of balancing professional and private life, further influencing their career advancement.
3. Women's' self-perception indicates that women see themselves primarily through relations they have with other persons and roles they have in those relations (the role of a mother, friend, colleague, etc.), influencing how women shape their identity but also their career progress (O'Neil & Bilimoria, 2005).

"Token" status and gender stereotypes

"Token" status of women was first described by Rosabeth Moss Kanter in 1977 indicating that "token" persons are those that make less than 15% of a certain social group. She suggested three reoccurring negative phenomenon in relation to

"token" status: 1. Increased visibility of "token" persons leads to higher pressures to fulfill professional expectations; 2. Polarisation leading to isolation of "token" persons from professional and informal networks and 3. Assimilation of "token" persons as they behave in accordance with the role defined by the society. This status of women in management creates a reality in which women managers are perceived as stereotypes, their competencies less valuable and different compared to men.

It is worth noticing that a majority in management positions, made of men, tends to maintain the "boy's club" as informal social network of men that exist at all levels in an organisation, serving to maintain status quo of male dominance at the top of the hierarchy (Oakley, 2000). Such organisational context maintains and strengthens the existing gender stereotypes about women in management where women are perceived as social, caring and sensitive, which are not characteristics of a successful manager while men are perceived as possessing a fighting spirit, aggressive and assertive, which are characteristics of a successful manager (Eagly,1987, Eagly et al., 2000). All this implies that women face unique barriers in their career that prevent or make the progress to management positions more difficult.

Organisational structure and imbalance between professional and private life

Although women have entered the workforce long time ago and somewhat positioned themselves in management in organisations they are still mostly responsible for family obligations, confirmed by the fact that 70% of women spend more time than men caring for children and elderly members of the family. (Families and Work Institute, 2005 quoted in Bilimoria et al., 2007). Despite the huge challenges of dual career women still face the traditional career development model based on continuous work, progress and promotion (Mavin, 2001; Pringle & Dixon, 2003). This model is linear and has no regard for specific factors mostly related to private life obligations that makes the women career development plan non-linear. Today the definition of a successful career is observed through the prism of "ideal employee" that can dedicate all his time to work, rebalancing his private life to respond to work challenges (Williams, 2000).

Although many organisations have implemented different support programs to overcome the

---

[1]"Token" or "Quota" women are women who are chosen to a certain position due to their biological defining feature, presenting both a commitment and limitation that they often deal only with perceived "female" issues. Mršević. Z. *(2011). Ka demokratskom društvu-rodna ravnopravnost.* Beograd. Institut društvenih nauka.

imbalance between professional and private commitments (flexible working hours, kindergarten within the company, etc.) this does not tackle the essence of the problem as research shows that even when employees use the benefits of such programs it still makes their career development more difficult (Families and Work Institute, 2005 quoted in Bilimoria et al., 2007). Imbalance between professional and private life, inability of organisations to create an adequate reward and promotion system for women that would be in line with their social and gender role of "those that care for others" leads to specific challenges to career progress for women.

Orientation towards inter-personal relations – important factor in career development

Women mostly perceive themselves through different relations and roles they have in those relations (mother, friend, wife, colleague, etc.) and this in turn influences the creation of their identity (Gilligan, 1982). Building relations with other persons is very important for women and so their responsibility and care for career as well as their career path is different compared to men (O'Neil & Bilimoria, 2005). Women can have different view on their carrier and the requirements and possibilities of a professional career due to influence of their role in the family,social expectations and possibilities created by the society for career development (Gilligan, 1982).

To summarise women are still perceived as persons who are primary focused on private, they care of others and in great measure their career path and progress depend on influence of different relations and the roles they have in those relations. Institutionalised male dominance in business sector and especially management positions makes it difficult for women to make progress towards management position, especially higher management.

INDIVIDUAL AND ORGANISATIONAL FACTORS

Studies of individual and organisational factors can be broadly divided into two groups (Oakley, 2000). The first group of studies looks at personal characteristics, attitudes and behaviour trying to explain underrepresentation of women in management while the second group focuses on research of organisational structure that makes career development more difficult for women (Fagenson, 1990). Although numerous studies in

both groups have made contributions to the study of this problem, most theoretical and empirical research rarely looked into the influence of personal and organisational factors simultaneously (Kirchmeyer, 1998). If women wish to strive toward higher managerial positions they have to simultaneously possess certain personal traits and skills (influence characteristics) and be in an organisational environment that will support them in use and development of their skills (inclusion characteristics) further indicating that research must encompass both factors – how a woman functions in a certain organisational environment and the nature of that context (Bilimoria et al., 2007).

Individual factors - influence

Generally speaking influence can be defined as how a person/woman affects the organisation based on its authority and efficiency in certain roles it has in an organisation (Zelechowski & Bilimoria, 2003). This definition includes the human capital of women – education, training skills, previous work experience (Becker, 1993) as well as her social capital that encompasses every aspect of social structure that creates certain values and enables a person to act in social relations – creating social networks, mentorship (Coleman, 1990). Social capital of a person influences how and how much a person can influence others to create success (Bilimoria et al., 2007).

Numerous researches indicate that possessing human and social capital can help women develop careers, high level of education and specialisation in certain area can help achieve greater influence in the organisation (Ragins et al., 1998). Highly developed social networks can enable access to information, financial resources and sponsors, making the person "visible" in the society (Seibert & Kramer, 2001).

These individual factors seen together can indicate the level of influence a women has in an organisation and help understand her career progress in the organisation. It is important to stress that these factors are not fixed categories but change over time as skills, experience and relations a woman creates in an organisation change.

Organisational factors - inclusion

Inclusion in an organisational sense can be defined as a way to determine how well a woman is integrated in the organisational environment

(Zelechowski & Bilimoria, 2003). Woman who is part of an inclusive organisational environment can express the full capacity of her talents and skills – this environment is characterised by norms that set relations between men and women free of gender stereotypes about their roles at work, is supportive of career development based on professional skills and abilities and supportive of professional – private life balance (McLean, 2003). On another side, a non-inclusive organisational environment excludes women from their social networks and slows down or stops career development for women irrespective of their personal characteristics (Bilimoria et al., 2007). The research has shown that numerous organisational barriers like training opportunities, career development, promotion and financial benefits can have a negative impact on career development for women irrespective of her personal traits (Oaekly, 2000). Related to the above, a research among women managers in Europe shows a negative attitude of the organisations towards women in selection for jobs abroad, women were not offered training in the area and very little attention has been given to their career development in this regard (Linehan & Scullion, 2001). Women are often excluded from the so called "boys club " as well as other sources of information (Reinhold, 2005), they are not provided with the possibility to have a mentor even though the research indicates

that women reap significant benefits from mentorship as they have to overcome more barriers in career development than men (Wallace, 2001).

Inclusion is a very important category to consider in our understanding of career development for women as personal influence of a woman is not enough to advance her career if she is in a non-inclusive organisational environment. We have to keep in mind that inclusion is a changeable category that can alter in time as organisational environment can change in its relation towards women.

INTEGRATIVE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Integrative theoretical framework represents a good foundation for simultaneous study of individual and organisational multidimensional factors, how they influence each other and how expressed they are. Based on the presented theoretical framework women can be placed in four profiles: strives, silent servants, accommodators and socialised achievers (figure 1.). Each of these profiles has different specific characteristics that influence women's career progress in the organisation based on interaction dynamics between individual and organisational factors (Bilimoria et al., 2007).

		INCLUSION	
		Lower level	Higher level
INFLUENCE	Higher level	Strivers	Socialised achievers
	Lower level	Silent servants	Accommodators

Figure 1: Integrative theoretical framework – influence and inclusion

Strives

Profile of a woman striver is characterised by high level of influence in the organisation whether based on her education, specialty or her social contacts. However, even though they have high level of influence they are at a low level when it comes to inclusion, they operate in an organisational environment that is not supportive for their career development, they do not have access to necessary social networks nor mentors that could help them in their carrier development

towards managerial positions (Metz & Tharenou, 2001).

Silent servants

This profile of women signifies low level or personal influence and inclusion in the organisation where they work. These women have no high level of education nor do they possess the specific job related skills or social contacts which ends in their low or non-existent influence in the organisation. If they are in a non-inclusive

organisational environment they are even more excluded from any domain that can contribute to their progress. Quite often these women have "token" status in organisation, due to requirements made by the government and quotas to achieve gender balance in higher managerial positions, organisations place these women in such positions to satisfy the requests without really doing more to solve the gender imbalance in higher managerial positions (Oakley, 2000).

Accommodators

Characteristics of this profile are low level of personal influence in an organisation with high level of inclusion. This profile also indicates that women have a great level of support in the organisation even without high level of influence. They often lack higher levels of education and skill necessary for career advancement into managerial positions but due to supportive and inclusive organisation they are in a position to acquire the education and skill necessary for career advancement (Oakley, 2000).

Socialised achievers

Women achievers have a high level of personal influence and inclusion in the organisation. They are often highly educated, have the necessary skills and are well positioned in the social networks giving them access to the financial and other resources to improve their carrier to higher managerial positions. The organisational environment is also very inclusive helping them to realise their full potential. They have a positive role model for other women and men which enables them to achieve success in the organisation and these women often take the role of mentor (Bilimoria et al., 2007). The research indicates that even one women in high managerial position in the organisation leads to creation of inclusive environment for women career development (Bilimoria, 2006; Ely, 1995) and overcoming traditional stereotypical view of women (Noe, 1988).

CONCLUSION

Contemporary organisations are faced with different challenges and one of them is the demographical change in the workforce structure – increasing number of women in the workforce. Considering all said, organisations should find a proper response to the specific needs related to women's career development, especially their progress to higher managerial positions. Analysing the most important obstacles women face in organisations and the society in general I have indicated that women career takes places in specific circumstances (different from men) and how these obstacles shape the career path for women advancing to higher managerial positions. These obstacles are not of the same type and of the same intensity, therefore it is important that future research of this problem integrate and systematise factors that encompass both personal influence of women and inclusion in the organisational environment. Integrative theoretical framework is a good starting point in such integrated study of factors that influence career development of women. Every woman has a different specific career development influenced by various dynamics of interaction between factors of influence and inclusion.

Considering all said and the fact that the research so far has focused on business sector, the future research should be focused on how influence and inclusion factors affect women career development in other specific organisational context like education. It is also worth noting that most researches so far have been done in the countries of western civilisation and it would be important if future research were conducted in countries with different cultural patterns.

Considering the four presented profiles of women, the future research should focus on the following: how certain factors can influence women to transform from one profile to another and what circumstances make certain factors dominant compared to others? What is the relationship of the management towards "silent" servants and what factors influence these women to transform into strives, accommodators or socialised achievers? How the support such as training and building social networks can help women to reach higher managerial positions? What are the characteristics of a career development for women, what prepares them for higher managerial positions and how these women influence younger women to strive for higher managerial positions?

For contemporary organisations it is important to understand factor dynamics that influences development of women's careers because it can contribute to successful business of every organisation and women themselves (Bilimoria et al, 2007).

REFERENCES

Becker, G.S. (1993). *Human Capital*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.

Bilimoria, D. (2006). The relationship between women corporate directors and women corporate offi cers. *Journal of Managerial Issues*, *18*(1), 47–61.

Bilimoria D., Godwin L. & Zelechowski D.D. (2007). Influence and inclusion: framework for researching women's advancement in organisations. In Bilimoria D. & Piderit S.K. (Eds.), *Handbook on Women in Business and Management*. Northampton, Massachusetts, USA: Edward Elgar Publishing, Inc., 232-253.

Coleman, J. (1990). *Foundations of Social Theory*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Eagly, A.H. (1987). *Sex Differences in Social Behavior: A Social-Role Interpretation*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Eagly, A.H., WoodW. & Diekman A.B. (2000). Social role theory of sex differences and similarities: a current appraisal. In Eckes T. & Trautner H. M. (Eds), *The Developmental Social Psychology of Gender*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Ely, R.J. (1995). The power in demography: women's social constructions of gender identity at work. *Academy of Management Journal*, *38*(3), 589–634.

Fagenson, E. (1990). At the heart of women in management research: theoretical and methodological approaches and their biases. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *9*(4/5), 267–274.

Gilligan, C. (1982). *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Higgins C. & Kram K. E. (2001). Reconceptualizing mentoring at work: a developmental network perspective. *Academy of Management Review*, *26* (2), 264–298.

Kanter, R.M. (1977). *Men and Women of the Corporation*. New York: Basic Books.

Kirchmeyer, C. (1998). Determinants of managerial success. *Journal of Management*, *24*(6), 673–692.

Kottke J.L. & Agars M.D. (2005). Understanding the processes that facilitate and hinder efforts to advance women in organizations. *Carrer Development International, 10* (3), 190-202.

Linehan, M. & Scullion H. (2001). Challenges for female international managers: evidence from Europe. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, *16* (3), 215–228.

Mavin, S. (2001). Women's careers in theory & practice: time for change?. *Women in Management Review*, *16*(4), 183–192.

McLean, D. (2003). *Workplaces that Work: Creating A Workplace Culture that Attracts, Retains and Promotes Women*. Ontario, Canada: Queen's Printer for Ontario.

Metz, I. & Tharenou P. (2001). Women's career advancement: the relative contribution of human and social capital. *Group & Organizational Management*, *26*(3), 312–42.

Mršević. Z. (2011). *Ka demokratskom društvu-rodna ravnopravnost.* Beograd. Institut društvenih nauka.

Noe, R. (1988). Women and mentoring: a review and research agenda. *Academy of Management Review*, *13*(1), 65–78.

Oakley, J. (2000). Gender-based barriers to senior management positions: understanding the scarcity of female CEOs. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *27* (4), 321–334.

O'Neil, D.A. & Bilimoria D. (2005), Women's career development phases: idealism, endurance, and reinvention. *Career Development International*, *10*(3), 168–193.

Pringle, J.K. & Dixon K.M. (2003). Re-incarnating life in the careers of women. *Career Development International*, *8*(6), 291–300.

Ragins, B.R., Townsend B. & Mattis M. (1998). Gender gap in the executive suite: CEOs and female executives report on breaking the glass ceiling. *The Academy of Management Executive*, *12*(1),28–42.

Rapoport, R., L. Bailyn, J. F. & Pruitt B. (2002). *Beyond Work Life Balance*. San Fransisco: Jossey-Bass.

Reinhold, B. (2005). Smashing glass ceilings: why women still find it tough to advance to the executive suite. *Journal of Organizational Excellence*, *24*(3), 43–55.

Seibert, S.E. & Kraimer M.L. (2001). A social capital theory of career success. *Academy of Management Journal*, *44* (2), 219–37.

Senden L. & Visser M. *(2014). Promoting Women in Management*. Brussels.http://www.womeninmanagement.eu/images/Study_Linda%20Senden.pdf

Wallace, J.E. (2001). The benefit of mentoring for female lawyers. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *58*, 366–391.

Williams, J. (2000). *Unbending Gender: Why Family and Work Conflict And What to Do About It*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Zelechowski, D.D. & Bilimoria D. (2003). The experience of women corporate inside directors on the boards of *Fortune* 1000 fi rms. *Women In Management Review*, *18*(7),376–81.