

How Gender Equality Can Lead to Women Employment: Going Beyond Women on the Board

Shivani Semwal^{1*}

ABSTRACT

Women are paid 79 cents for every dollar paid to men—despite the fact that over the last several decades' millions more women have joined the workforce and made huge gains in their educational attainment. Too often it is assumed that this pay gap is not evidence of discrimination, but is instead a statistical artefact of failing to adjust for factors that could drive earnings differences between men and women. However, these factors—particularly occupational differences between women and men—are themselves often affected by gender bias. For example, by the time a woman earns her first dollar, her occupational choice is the culmination of years of education, guidance by mentors, expectations set by those who raised her, hiring practices of firms, and widespread norms and expectations about work–family balance held by employers, co-workers, and society. In other words, even though women disproportionately enter lower-paid, female-dominated occupations, this decision is shaped by discrimination, societal norms, and other forces beyond women's control. The gender wage gap is real—and hurts women across the board by suppressing their earnings and making it harder to balance work and family. Serious attempts to understand the gender wage gap should not include shifting the blame to women for not earning more. Rather, these attempts should examine where our economy provides unequal opportunities for women at every point of their education, training, and career choices.

Keywords: *Gender, Leadership, Managerial stereotype, Masculine, Feminine Gender Leadership*

Organizational leadership is a driving force that creates a culture that has a lasting impact on the organization's performance and employee morale. Leadership determines the success or failure of the organization. Furthermore, gender diversity must exist within organizational leadership because it gives the overall organization a competitive advantage within its market and drives success. Gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, and identities of female, male, how to cite this paper: Howard Jr., D. D. (2023). Gender Leadership Styles in Higher Education: A Transformational Leadership Study. *Open Journal of Leadership*, 12, 543-561. Furthermore, gender also influences how people perceive themselves and each other, how they interact, and the distribution of power and resources in society (Heidari et al., 2016: p. 1).

¹Post Graduate Student, USMS GGSIPU, Dwarka India & Currently working with IIT DELHI as an Administrator.

*Corresponding Author

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How Gender Equality Can Lead to Women Employment: Going Beyond Women on the Board

The impact on other diversity indicators

The development of women's "professional imagination", i.e. their career expectations and aspirations, within companies with more women on the board is difficult to measure and grasp through quantitative metrics, at least in the short term. Furthermore, the expected improvement in diversity metrics such as the percentage of women in leadership and management roles and the pay ratios has not translated into the data. Indeed, based on the analysis conducted on the data disclosed by companies within the Corporate Sustainability Assessment, the correlation between women on the board and other diversity indicators is low. Companies with more women on the board have a slightly higher proportion of women on average at different levels of responsibility. However, it is unclear whether greater board diversity drives this trend or whether companies with a more diverse workforce appoint more women directors.

Why don't the benefits trickle down?

Simply focusing on appointing more women on the board is not enough to achieve gender equality across companies. But why? Several factors are of relevance.

1. As women have been facing discrimination in entering the corporate workplace for decades, they tend to have lower levels of experience in the industry, which can hinder their legitimacy. (Smith, N. (2018) Gender quotas on boards of directors. IZA World of Labor.)
2. Including women as non-executive or independent directors does not necessarily achieve the desired results, because executive members tend to have more say. This is especially relevant in the context of two-tier boards, where attention should be paid to have gender representation on both boards, and not just on the supervisory board. (Kowalewska, H. (2020) Bringing Women on Board: The Social Policy Implications of Gender Diversity in Top Jobs. Journal of Social Policy, 49 (4).)
3. Women often face negative stereotypes in the workplace, which lead them to be perceived as less capable than their male counterparts and therefore to their views not being considered as equally important in the decision-making process. (7 McKinsey & Company (2017). Women Matter: Time to accelerate. Ten years of insight into gender diversity.)
4. Simply because they are women does not mean that they have diversity and inclusion on the top of their agendas.
5. While we might observe an increasing percentage of women on boards, this does not necessarily mean that there are more women directors overall. In some countries, women simply hold more directorships than men on average, meaning that we see the same women increasing the board diversity numbers for multiple companies, rather than an increasing number of individual women taking up these positions. (Adams, R. B. (2015) Myths and Facts about Female Directors. IFC Corporate Governance Knowledge Publication 37).

Having more women in leadership will also diminish the biases and negative stereotypes around women's ability to lead, hopefully addressing issues around unequal pay and gender pay gaps.

The challenges of women's participation in leadership

Many barriers have limited women's participation in leadership globally. One key factor to these barriers is structure, which can be narrowed down to a lack of legal instrument that upholds equity in leadership participation. According to Women Watch (2007), there have

How Gender Equality Can Lead to Women Employment: Going Beyond Women on the Board

been efforts by the international community to promote gender equality in leadership and to eliminate any form of discrimination against women.

The challenge of women's participation in a leadership position can be attributed to many factors, which have been identified through an empirical review of works in literature.

1. Lack of institutional and legal affirmative action. There is a lack of institutional policies and programs that promote affirmative action that would have brought women fully into leadership positions. This coupled with discrimination has become systemic barrier to women participation in leadership role alongside with men (Women Watch, 2007)
2. The traditional role of the women and the girl-child in carrying out household chores, often leaves them with little or no time for formal education and self-development.
3. Stereotypical constraints against women in striving to attain political and organizational leadership roles to the top (Okafor, Fagbemi, and Hassan, 2011).
4. Obnoxious socio-cultural practices that include widowhood practices, female genital mutilation (FGM), restrictive religious practices (as observed in the Northern geopolitical zone), and purdah system (observed in the northern part of the country) (Aina, 2012). These obnoxious sociocultural practices have hindered women's participation in leadership positions.
5. Non-extension of equal rights to all citizens, especially women, because they are seen as second-hand citizens in some parts of the country. In such cases, they are not allowed to participate in anything even at the grassroots level. Women are made to see that their permanent position which they could occupy fully is in the kitchen (Okafor, Fagbemi & Hassan, 2011).
6. Sexual harassment. Within the workplace and political space, sexual harassment is a challenge to women's participation in leadership positions and decision-making. Sexual harassment is considered a "major barrier to leadership positions. There are pieces of evidence that women who reject sexual advances from men usually never get promoted or recommended and sometimes, they are frustrated out of the workforce (Women Watch, 2007).

What is IOE's position on Gender Equality and Diversity?

IOE recognises that workforce diversity increases business efficiency, productivity and sustainability, and therefore, positively impacts economic performance and society as a whole. IOE works to support its members in all countries, at all stages of development, to promote a wider understanding of the benefits of workplace diversity and to equip them to engage with domestic law and regulation in drafting diversity policies and practices that are not only legally compliant, but fully realise the operational and productivity benefits.

With regard to the promotion of gender equality, in particular, it is generally in an employer's interest to promote workplaces that are free from discrimination against women (and others) and to ensure that decisions related to employment are based on an individual's merit rather than other attributes. In this context, employers aim at the effective elimination of barriers to equal access to training and education, recruitment and career development opportunities.

Female-dominated professions pay less, but it's a chicken-and-egg phenomenon

Many women do go into low-paying female-dominated industries. Home health aides, for example, are much more likely to be women. But research suggests that women are making a logical choice, *given existing constraints*. This is because they will likely *not* see a

How Gender Equality Can Lead to Women Employment: Going Beyond Women on the Board

significant pay boost if they try to buck convention and enter male-dominated occupations. Exceptions certainly exist, particularly in the civil service or in unionized workplaces (Anderson, Hegewisch, and Hayes 2015). However, if women in female-dominated occupations were to go into male-dominated occupations, they would often have similar or lower expected wages as compared with their female counterparts in female-dominated occupations (Pitts 2002). Thus, many women going into female-dominated occupations are actually situating themselves to earn higher wages. These choices thereby maximize their wages (Pitts 2002). This holds true for all categories of women except for the most educated, who are more likely to earn more in a male profession than a female profession. There is also evidence that if it becomes more lucrative for women to move into male-dominated professions, women will do exactly this (Pitts 2002). In short, occupational choice is heavily influenced by existing constraints based on gender and pay-setting across occupations.

Programmes and Schemes for Improving Overall Status of Women

When the State intervenes on behalf of women to adhere to its constitutional obligations and to improve women's overall status on par with men, it is either in the form of policies, laws, or shames and programmes. These implementation, policies and legislations have to be backed up by schemes and programmes for certain objectives to be actualised.

Over the decades, there have been many women-centric schemes with good intentions and with objectives of transforming women's lives for the better. These span various dimensions related to women's lives like economic development, education and health. Entire institutions have been built for facilitating implementation of interventions – Central Social Welfare Board is an example.

Schemes in the context of Violence against Women

The schemes that address violence against women can be broadly categorized under the theme of "Prevention of Violence against Women" and "Provision of Support Services to Women Survivors".

While prevention of violence requires numerous immediate, medium and long term interventions including large scale campaigns to sensitise and educate men and women on VAW which is lacking in any comprehensive or substantial way at present, support services to women in distress are provided today mainly through the Swadhar Greh scheme and the Ujjwala scheme in the case of trafficking.

At the state level, there are variants of Short Stay Home schemes. Most schemes are proposed by civil society groups. These are not necessarily need-based and there are no plans apparent to scale up schemes to all blocks or districts, except for the recent announcements initially with the new NDA government towards setting up Nirbhaya Centres in all districts of the country, which was subsequently scaled down drastically in FY 2015-16, unfortunately.

Schemes related to Girl Child Protection and Development

While declining sex ratio (especially Child Sex Ratio) and son preference are reflections of very deep-seated socio-cultural discrimination against girls, and therefore, require multi-pronged approaches in dealing with the issues involved, there have been a few schemes that attempted to address the issue and ensure 'girl child protection'.

How Gender Equality Can Lead to Women Employment: Going Beyond Women on the Board

Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Andolan: The Government has recently launched a much-needed initiative around protection and development of the girl child through this campaign. While this is a more comprehensive approach towards tackling son preference and girl child discrimination, the usual response from the state has been to run schemes which involve conditional cash transfers to deal with individual girl children, case by case.

The current gender gap in the workplace

Although there has been some progress in women's representation over the past few years, the McKinsey study showcases the disparity between men and women in the workplace. It finds that women are less likely to be hired into entry-level jobs than men, even though they currently earn more bachelor's degrees and have the same attrition rate. As employees move up the corporate ladder, the disparity increases. For every 100 men promoted to manager, only 86 women achieve the same status.

Equal Pay Day

Equal Pay Day represents how far in the year women must work in order to make the same amount of money men did in the previous year. Since women typically earn less than men, currently 84 cents on the dollar, they would need to work 42 days longer to earn the same amount of money. This wage gap is often even greater for women of color.

How to create gender equality in the workplace?

Legal changes aside, companies can focus on cultural and organizational changes to reduce gender inequality. It is not enough to simply hire more women, although that is a start. Businesses must make an effort to both close the gender gap and make their workplaces truly inclusive, since diversity alone doesn't create inclusive workplaces.

1. Focus on diversity during your recruitment process.

Creating gender equality in the workplace starts with your recruitment process. Work toward a diverse and equitable workplace by creating accurate and inclusive job descriptions, sourcing a gender-diverse candidate pipeline, and conducting fair interviews. It's important to ensure your hiring process is free of internal bias. These measures should be taken for every level of seniority; however, they are especially important for executive positions.

2. Create fair compensation and promotion procedures.

Create an employee compensation program that is fair, equitable and transparent. Offer your employees equal pay for equal work, regardless of their gender. This is one of the most obvious and easy ways you can work towards gender equality in your workplace. Offering competitive and fair pay is also a great way to attract and retain top talent.

3. Offer flexible and supportive employee benefits.

The McKinsey study found that employee burnout is one of the largest stressors currently impacting women in the workplace. Since the pandemic, women are disproportionately affected by burnout, stress and exhaustion compared to their male counterparts. What's more, 1 in 3 women said they considered downshifting their career or leaving the workforce.

4. Create a diversity and inclusion training program.

Train your employees on what is and isn't acceptable in the workplace. Have your employees attend a diversity training program customized to your business to address potential biases and prejudices within your organization. This can also encourage your employees to move from awareness to action in terms of allyship.

How Gender Equality Can Lead to Women Employment: Going Beyond Women on the Board

5. Hold managers accountable.

According to Price, companies must become assertive about gender diversity and treat it as an integral part of their business strategies. She suggested tying supervisors' bonuses to diversity and inclusion objectives.

"It is important for companies to track, measure, and hold managers accountable for diversity and inclusion efforts," Price said. "If this important business metric is not tracked, we may never see any improvement."

6. Build an inclusive company culture.

To bridge the gap, companies must create a culture where employees feel a sense of belonging and acceptance. They should focus on improving their cultures to increase inclusion and enhance employee experience and engagement. Along with creating gender equality, Price said fostering inclusivity can spur innovation, retain valuable talent and reduce attrition rates.

Women can also benefit from working with other women. According to McKinsey, 1 in 5 women said they were often the only woman, or one of the only women, in the room at work. This was twice as common for senior-level women and women in technical roles. Women who are "only" have a significantly worse experience than women who work with other women, and about 80% of them receive macroaggressions, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative prejudicial slights and insults.

Employees want to work in an environment where they feel valued and treated fairly. Focusing on diversity, equity and inclusion to bridge the gender gap can be key to attracting and retaining top talent.

A diverse and inclusive workforce fosters greater employee engagement, which in turn can increase financial returns and market share. Engaged employees tend to feel more energized and connected to their organization, and they are often willing to go the extra mile to maximize productivity. High employee engagement is also linked to higher employee retention, which saves money on recruitment costs.

Providing your employees with an inclusive and equitable space to be creative is ideal for innovation. A diverse workforce brings a unique set of ideas and perspectives to the table, and an inclusive culture that allows those voices equal opportunity to be heard is great for creating new solutions. The key to this is being both diverse and inclusive.

"It is time we all acknowledge that having a diverse and inclusive workforce is good for business," Price said. "The numbers simply don't lie."

Leadership focus of diversity management in the deep approach

When we consider leadership focus of diversity management in the deep approach, the focus turns to the hidden diversity characteristics, often values such as being inclusive or hidden diversity characteristics such as their professional focus. The range of focus can be narrow or broad. 650 International Journal of Cross-Cultural Management 23(3) The narrow leadership focus in the deep approach has one or two deep-level diversity characteristics as part of leadership's efforts to develop cultural inclusion. Organizations with a narrow focus may result from the workforce's composition, mission, or the sector or location in which it works. These may be part of the organization's values and culture. In the deep approach, the emphasis is on a positive inclusion climate that embraces a few deep-level characteristics.

How Gender Equality Can Lead to Women Employment: Going Beyond Women on the Board

This can result in increased psychological safety for employees who align with the organization's focus, which can lead to increasing creativity, innovation, and staff engagement (Truss et al., 2013). Employees who do not fully embrace the values in focus may be less engaged to contribute fully to the organization. Where organizations have a broad focus, the leadership focus on several values that contribute to how leadership develops cultural inclusion within their organization. The many deep values are also integrated into the organization's culture and purpose, enabling leadership to create an organization where everyone can experience inclusion and belonging through the inclusive climate. Leadership's broad focus on the deep approach requires leadership to develop cultural inclusion within their teams and organizations for their staff to experience inclusion and belonging. As a result, the organisation will have high levels of creativity and innovation and increase employee engagement and well-being (Goswami and Kishor, 2018).

CONCLUSION

In summary, a gender-inclusive culture is one that values and respects all individuals regardless of their gender identity. It actively works to create safe and inclusive spaces where people can express themselves freely and without fear of discrimination. It prioritizes education and knowledge about gender diversity and takes an intersectional approach to understand how different identities and experiences impact gender. Ultimately, a gender-inclusive culture helps to break down gender-based power structures that lead to marginalization and exclusionary practices.

When companies create an inclusive work environment, they are better positioned to recruit and retain a diverse pool of talented employees, including women. By offering equal opportunities and providing a supportive work environment, they can create a workplace culture that is attractive to top talent. This can result in increased employee engagement, job satisfaction, and productivity, which can ultimately lead to better business outcomes.

Inclusivity in workspace, especially for women, and it is crucial that MSMEs prioritize creating a work environment that is diverse, equitable, and inclusive. The benefits of inclusivity are many, and they go beyond improving workplace culture and employee morale. Inclusivity can help companies to attract and retain top talent, drive innovation and creativity, and improve business outcomes.

Inclusivity in workspace can also foster innovation and creativity within the workplace. When employees come from diverse backgrounds, they bring unique perspectives and experiences that can lead to innovative solutions to business problems. MSMEs can benefit from this by tapping into the full potential of their employees and driving growth and success for the business.

In conclusion, inclusivity in workspace is essential for companies to succeed in today's global economy. By creating a diverse and inclusive work environment that provides equal opportunities and support for all employees, workplaces can attract and retain top talent, foster innovation and creativity, and ultimately drive growth and profitability. Therefore, companies must prioritize creating inclusivity in workspace culture that values and respects all employees, including women.

In humanitarian action, the promotion of gender equality is aligned with the fundamental goals of humanity: to alleviate human suffering and respect human dignity. However, the promotion of gender equality in practice and its relationship with the humanitarian principles

How Gender Equality Can Lead to Women Employment: Going Beyond Women on the Board

is complicated. The principle of impartiality and its central needs-based approach provide an essential entry point for efforts to support gender equality, through tailored humanitarian assistance based on analysis of gender-related differences in access to basic services and resources. Impartiality can support agencies to be gender responsive, if this approach is implemented in an inclusive way that responds to the full diversity of people's needs in conflict contexts. However, in pursuing more ambitious, longer-term objectives that require shifts of a structural nature, impartiality is limited. This is because the principle mainly responds to the outcomes of inequality rather than address its drivers, including social norms, economic systems or government policy. With its focus on needs and vulnerability, the approach underpinning impartiality also risks curtailing the agency of conflict-affected people and reproducing existing power imbalances between affected communities and humanitarian agencies.

In practice, the ability to work in accordance with the principles is dependent on the perceptions of actors in conflict contexts, including affected communities, host governments and warring parties. The absence of objective criteria for the fulfilment of the humanitarian principles means that their compatibility with the promotion of gender equality is highly context dependent. As a result, efforts to overcome systemic barriers to promote and secure the impartial access of marginalized groups to assistance may cause tension with other principles, including neutrality. This is particularly the case in contexts of systemic marginalization, where the achievement of impartiality may necessitate actions to address the social and political barriers facing marginalized communities. However, if the principles, like neutrality, are being applied in a way that prevents humanitarian agencies from meeting the full range of people's needs in these environments, this will weaken the ability of these organizations to achieve the fundamental goal of humanity. Going forward, there is a need for further critical examination and assessment of the application of the principles in different contexts to understand how, and the extent to which, they pose a barrier to the promotion of gender equality and inclusion.

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How Gender Equality Can Lead to Women Employment: Going Beyond Women on the Board

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