

Gender stereotypes' impacts on organizations and women managers' performance.

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Abstract: The aim of this literature review is to provide a clear definition of the concept of gender stereotyping and to explore the impact of gender-role stereotypes on an organisation's decisions such as selection and evaluation, as well as on women managers' performance. This review of the literature indicates that there is general agreement that the gender-role stereotype continues to be a key barrier to, and is responsible for the slower progress of, women's presence in high management positions. Gender stereotypes are consistent across cultures and time; however, there is some degree of variation across the world which confirms that gender stereotypes are structured by limited cognitive and social systems which may change over time. Adequate evidence supports the fact that gender-role stereotyping has a negative effect on women's managerial performance such as in their negotiation and decision-making performance. In addition, gender stereotypes also negatively influence organisational decisions such as selection and evaluation in a way which constrains women from progressing to higher levels of managerial achievement.

Key term: gender stereotype, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, educational leadership, managers' performance,

1. INTRODUCTION

There are many theories in the literature available that attempt to explain why women are underrepresented in senior management positions. Adkinson (1981), however, posits that "the dominant theory to explain the lack of women in administration and leadership positions is socialization and sex role stereotypes" (in Smyth, 2005 p. 69). Gender stereotyping and bias is accountable for the slower advancement of women in organisations (Bergeron, Block, & Echtenkam, 2006). This paper aims to contribute to understanding gender stereotyping, and to explore its impact on organisations and women managers' performance. The literature review that follows will be used to answer the questions: (1) what is the concept of stereotype and gender stereotypes? (2) Is managerial 'gender-typing' considered as a global phenomenon? (3) Do gender stereotypes affect organisational decisions and women managers' performance negatively?

1.1 The background to the discussion

The focus for this assignment has been chosen based on my area of study and following discussion with my supervisor; it is regarding analysing women's roles in the field of educational leadership in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and presenting some of the difficulties that face women as leaders. In addition, it centres on gender stereotypes and its role in women's underrepresentation in senior leadership positions in the KSA.

As a predominantly Muslim country, the KSA has different educational policies for girls in comparison to many other Islamic countries. These educational policies deal mainly with gender – keeping male and female students separate from each other. As a result of these policies, women's educational institutions are separate from those of men

(Almenkash, 2009). It would be expected, due to such a policy, that women lead the educational departments for women at all levels in the educational hierarchy (of those institutions). The reality, however, is different; powerful roles and positions with potential in the educational leadership process for women's departments, at the senior level, are dominated by men (Al-Essa, 2009).

Women in Saudi Arabia have made great strides in educational achievement and workforce participation; for instance, Saudi government figures show that women make up 57% of the total student population at universities (The Ministry of Higher Education in Saudi Arabi, 2010). Besides, according to Saudi statistics, women hold more than 45% of the total jobs in the Ministry of Education; the largest sector in which women work in Saudi Arabia (Department of Statistics and Information, 2010). On the other hand, only a very few of them hold high job positions (AL-Udwan, 2008). At this point some important questions are raised; for instance: Why do women in Saudi education not hold senior educational leadership positions? Is this because they are not skilled enough to hold these positions? Does this status for women reflect the social aspect of gender bias and leadership in Saudi Arabia? Unfortunately, it was not easy to answer these questions. Regarding the case during my search, for appropriate literature, is that I have come across many difficulties in regard to a lack of resources and studies which can provide evidence and discuss the status of women, holding high positions in educational leadership in the KSA.

In order to contribute to an understanding of the role that society plays in structuring gender-based culture, and the discourse on male dominance and the current situation in Saudi Arabia, together with its related impact on society, I will rely on Western literature and studies for two reasons. The first one is because there is rich evaluation and analysis in terms of women's segregation, concerning their high positions as leaders which relates to the situation in Saudi Arabia, as well as the fact that western research is steeped in empirical studies which are absent in Saudi Arabia. The second reason is that a growing body of research is demonstrating that "in many areas of human personality and behaviour; cross-cultural similarities generally outweigh cross-cultural differences" (Williams & Best, 1982 p. 29).

In order to address the questions set out above, the discussion is divided into two parts. In the first part, the aim is to provide clear information about the concept of gender stereotypes and to identify whether or not it is considered as a global phenomenon. The second part reviews how the existence of stereotypical thinking can affect organisational decisions; such as selection and evaluation. Finally, an extra part will be added to focus on my personal reflections on the content of this course and the lessons learned on how to conduct a literature review.

1.2 The concept of gender stereotypes

Stereotypes are "beliefs about the characteristics, attributes, and behaviours of members of certain groups" (Hilton & Hippel, 1996 p. 240). Stereotypes are structured by cognitive and social systems combined. From parents, teachers, other significant adults and the public media, individuals can learn stereotypes among different groups in their formative years (Hamilton & Sherman, 1994). Stereotypes can also be defined as cognitive images or general beliefs that we hold and use to make sense of our complicated social structure (Catalyst, 2007). These images help us to distinguish among different groups of people; therefore, in gender stereotypes, these images help us to differentiate between women and men (ibid). Hoyt and Blascovich (2007) also defined how gender stereotypes "encompass stereotypic beliefs about the attributes of women and men that prescribe how men and women should, or ought to, be" (p. 596). 'Gender stereotypicality' of a job is a person's conception about a particular job, and whether it is masculine or feminine (Bonwen *et al.*, 2000).

The internal negative consequential effect of gender stereotypes on female performance is called the 'stereotype threat' (Lipka, 2008). The stereotype threat is a social-psychological experience that is defined as "the event of a negative stereotype

about a group to which one belongs becoming self-relevant, usually as a plausible interpretation for something one is doing, for an experience one is having, or for a situation one is in, that has relevance to one's self-definition" (Steele, 1997 p. 616).

Gender stereotypes are hard to identify and pick up on, and often go unobserved as part of an automatic process, whereby its negative impacts are dismissed or underestimated by people (Catalyst, 2007). Bergeron and Colleagues (2006) stated that in terms of negative gender stereotypes about women in the workplace, the process of the stereotype threat can be observed. However, Steele and Aronson (1994) established that "the effects of stereotype threat are real. What is less clear is the process through which the stereotype threat is formed" (in Agars, 2004 p.109).

Stereotyping frequently takes place because of "cognitive capacity limitations. When forming impressions of others, perceivers frequently are exposed to a complex array of social information, but have only limited cognitive resources with which to process this information" (Madon et al., 2006 p.178). However, stereotypes could change over time when the presence of such information is disconfirmed (Powell et al., 2002).

2 Is managerial gender stereotyping considered a global phenomenon?

Is "Think manager - think male" a global phenomenon? Or it is something related to a country's culture? This relationship between the role of stereotypes relating to gender, and management success across cultures has been examined by many researchers. Williams and Best (1982) examined gender stereotypes in 30 countries, where participants were asked to rate whether adjectives in a list were more often connected with men or women. They concluded that gender stereotypes are surprisingly consistent across cultures and time. Besides, Izraeli and Adler (1994 p. 13) concluded in their research that, "The specific image of an ideal manager varies across cultures, yet everywhere it privileges those characteristics that the culture associates primarily with men" (cited in Schein, 2001).

Another study applied the identical Schein 92-item Descriptive Index to 361 male and 228 female management students and similar samples and procedures in Great Britain, Germany, Japan and China. It was found that, regardless of country's context, males and females in these countries believe that successful middle managers possess characteristics and personality, more commonly held by men, than by women (Schein et al., 1996). Among females, however, "the managerial sex typing hypothesis was confirmed in every country except the U.S.A., in which men and women are seen as equally likely to possess requisite management characteristics" (ibid, p. 33). This research concludes that there are some variations in the degree of managerial gender typing of females between countries. These distinctions may reflect opinions on the lack of opportunity of management participation for women. For instance, in the USA, large numbers of women are not gender typed in management positions, with their strong ongoing efforts for change (Schein et al., 1996).

3 Can gender stereotypes affect organisations' and women managers' performance negatively?

This section discusses how the existence of stereotypical thinking can affect organisational decisions such as selection and evaluation. In addition, it explores the ways in which gender-role stereotypes impact on a woman's abilities, particularly in management positions, and how these stereotypes can actually undermine her performance in a managerial role.

3.1 Gender stereotypes impacts on organisational decisions:

It is argued that being competent does not guarantee that women will advance to the same organisational position as men, because of the way that gender bias influences work-setting evaluations (Heilman, 2001); decision makers "are likely to evaluate male managers more favourably than female managers who have exhibited equivalent

performance” (Bartol, 1999 cited in Powell et al., 2002 p.178). Heilman and Parks-Stamm (2007) claim that in workplace settings, gender stereotypes are the source of prejudice in the performance evaluation of women.

Little evidence of overall gender stereotyping in performance evaluation was found in a study by Bonwen and colleagues (2000) which examined gender stereotypes in relation to job performance. However, there were considerable “pro-male biases when only men served as raters. Measure-specific ‘gender stereotypicality’, instead of ‘general stereotypicality’ about the job produced gender bias in performance appraisal. Masculine measures produced pro-male bias, and feminine measures produced pro-female bias” (Bonwen et al., 2000 p.2194).

Agars (2004) verifies that stereotypes are a significant contributor to the limited representation of women in senior positions, and it is necessary that the impact of stereotypes on organisational decisions is reconsidered. The gender-role stereotypical thinking impedes women at all levels of management (Powell et al., 2002). These practices “not only prevent competent women from achieving their full potential, but also hinder organizations from capitalizing on some of their most talented employees” (Catalyst, 2007 p. 29). When decision makers judge that masculine characteristics are the most suitable for management roles and men own these characteristics better than women, then they are more likely to recruit men for high management positions rather than equally-qualified females (Powell et al., 2002).

In other words, leadership that is transformational, is becoming the new emphasis in this time as a future-oriented approach which supports organisations by inspiring followers’ creativity and commitment (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). In addition, this increased call suggests that organisations benefit when their leaders demonstrate a high level of female characteristics. Because women show a more transformational leadership style and a greater use of delegation reward as well as lesser use of passive management, therefore, depending on this evidence, organisational decisions which are influenced by gender stereotypes, when selecting their managers, will impede organisations’ chances of attaining leaders who are particularly successful within the modern business environment (Eagly et al., 2003). Further, Fuegen (2007) states that the fact that “gender stereotypes affect many work-related judgments and decisions is well-established. Research in social and organisational psychology shows that gender stereotypes affect perceptions of job suitability, leadership ability and the likelihood of obtaining promotions” (p.79).

3.2 Gender stereotypes’ impacts on women’s managerial performance:

Although there is an average body of research discussing the negative effects of gender stereotypes on organisational decisions, the impact of these stereotypes on the actual performance of women in management has only been given limited attention (Schein, 1978). In laboratory conditions, Kray and colleagues (2001) investigated the impact of the negative stereotype that women are perceived as a threat in the aspect of managerial behaviour, particularly in negotiation performance. They concluded that women negotiated worse than men when the stereotype threat was significant. On the other hand, when the stereotype threat was not salient there was no difference between women’s and men’s negotiation performance (Kray *et al.*, 2002).

Extending the research by Kray and her colleagues (2001), other research investigated the impact of the stereotype threat on women’s performance of a managerial task, and looked at gender role as a mediator of the stereotype threat effect. However, this research was examining a different type of managerial task; namely, managerial decision-making. This research illustrated that women in managerial and executive positions are less competent than men in the masculine gender role-typed condition but not in the feminine gender role-typed condition. As a result these effects confirm a boundary condition for the influence of the stereotype threat (Bergeron et al., 2006).

Furthermore, discrimination and stereotyping can cause stress for women in the workplace. A study focusing on workplace stressors for women reported that “women in

particular are exposed to the following stressors: multiple roles; lack of career progress and discrimination and stereotyping” (Gyllensten & Palmer, 2005 p. 272).

Conclusion

Western literature and studies contribute to providing rich information about the concept of gender stereotypes and to understanding the role that society plays in structuring the discourse on male dominance culture and its related impact on society. Although women continue to strive to attain upper management positions, there is agreement in the literature that the gender-role stereotype is a key barrier, and is responsible for the slower progress of women's existence in high management positions. Adequate evidence supports the fact that that gender-role stereotyping has a negative effect on women's managerial performance such as in negotiation and decision-making performance. Gender stereotypes also negatively influence organisational decisions such as selection and evaluation in a way which undermines women from progressing to higher levels of managerial achievement.

Although gender stereotypes are consistent across cultures and time, there is some degree of variation across the world which confirms that gender stereotypes are structured by combined, limited cognitive and social systems, but this is changeable over time when the information is no longer valid.

What is unknown as yet, is the significant connection between gender stereotyping and its impacts on a woman's performance, which serves to limit her performance in the organisation. Therefore, further investigation of this connection between gender stereotype and its negative impacts is suggested. In addition, further direct examination is needed as to the degree of culture variations of female gender stereotyping in management positions, including the effects of ongoing efforts for change, would appear necessary.

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