

Gender Biasness: A Corporate or a Social Concern

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Abstract

Female occupational segregation at work place limits the growth opportunities for women in Pakistan. Social and cultural patterns make the male managers to perceive women as weak creatures, less capacitated to handle the stress at work place. These sets of perception also lead to the unequal distribution of resources between male and female and also impede the growth opportunities for women in Pakistan. Indeed gender inequality is one of the arguments underlying the support for female at workforce throughout the world, but the fact is that the females have the potential to contribute to economic performance of the organization. This paper aims at exploring various dimensions of the corporate social responsibility phenomenon to see the possibilities of linking the concept dimensions to strengthening the women's position both professionally and socially which eventually may result in the overall socio-economic development of the country.

Introduction

The phenomenon of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has a long history where industrial world performed its socially responsible role not just within the workplace in terms of model factories, employee dividend schemes and enhanced working conditions but also within the community (Ruth Pearson, 2007). Recently, this widely accepted term has more meanings attached to it, forcing corporate world to change its structure and environment accordingly thus empowering employees, eliminating gender biases and more concerns for stakeholders etc. Less important issues are now being given a great consideration due to changing social and cultural patterns i.e. more emphasis given to gender related issues which was seriously neglected in the past. Gender equality, a traditional domain of sociologists and political scientists, is increasingly addressed by corporations. Female workforce participation has increased recently and has become a driving force behind economic growth. In many countries of the west more policy measures are taken to address the issue and help parents combine work with family responsibilities whereas in eastern countries still reverse trends are seen. Employment structure is formed in a way that pushes the females to lower paid jobs, cuts in social protection and unequal distribution of resources. Formerly, female participation as economic agents was beyond imagination but when they entered the field they were thought as inferior and incapable and hence were forced into lower ranks.

Changing global scenario has also influenced the acceptance of females as economic partners but still they have largely been forgotten as associates of the economic decision making process. Their work recognition is negligible while their participation is encouraged in the labour force as females are considered more suitable for supporting staff. In Developing countries like Pakistan male managers perceive females as weak creature, less capacitated to handle stress at workplace. The inherent problems in the social and educational systems are causing biasness when come to females. In developing countries like Pakistan, social system restricts female participation in the society depriving them from education, health and nutrition; they are allowed to be part only of the big picture of society mostly due to economic pressures. This approach has generated a negative vibe in the other segment of the workforce i.e. males who take them as inferior. Traditionally females are taken as capable of playing merely the role of homemaker but with the increased heterogeneity among workforce, changes in policies are observed. The increased participation of women has been observed at different managerial level in different work organizations (Deal & Stevenson, 1998). Despite their representation at different organizations female managers are frequently facing certain hurdles to the higher management levels known as "glass ceilings" (Morrison, White, & Van Veslor, 1987) which is due to stereotype attitude having the traditional image towards an object, person or phenomenon etc without questioning. Prevailing situation is also strengthened by high illiteracy rate in Pakistan.

Females are considered as the weaker part of the society with submissive, sentimental, illogical and emotional traits while males are considered as prudent, logical, and competitive. In a country like Pakistan where nation is facing a huge financial crisis there are more and more pressures on both the partners and the society to support their families. In previous regime of Gen. Pervaiz Musharraf females were allowed to fully participate in every walk of life but still, female manager's complaint about traditional behaviours and old policies inherent in the system which are hindering their way up to the ladder. Being considered illogical and emotional they are not given the authority and mostly decision making powers which remain with the males who question their above said traits.

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This perception also creates gap between the two occupational segments while allocating the resources heightening stress among female managers. Corporate social responsibility stresses the importance of the gendered nature of the institutional context in which value chains operate, and the importance of acknowledging that labour markets are themselves gendered institutions which reflect socially constructed divisions of labour (Ruth Pearson, 2007). The scarcity of females at the top levels of the organizations is a result of gender biasness in evaluations arguing that their competency itself will not ensure advancement to the same organizational levels as an equivalent performing male, it is to observe whether organizations are considering their role of social responsibility and eliminating any hindrance present in the system. This paper aims at exploring various dimensions of the corporate social responsibility phenomenon to see the possibilities of linking the concept dimensions to the strengthening of women's position both professionally and socially.

Situational Background

Since independence, Pakistan has veered back and forth between democratically-elected and authoritarian military leaders, coupled with an unstable relationship with neighboring countries. During eight years of rule, Pervaiz Musharraf has done many good things for Pakistan, most notably building a relatively stable and fast-growing economy (GDP growth in 2006 was 6.5%). He also made considerable efforts to create independent institutions, like HEC, to improve the provision of education and other social services. He also introduced local governance systems and networks with enhanced female participation both at provincial and national level in Pakistan. Unfortunately, the situation has worsened afterwards significantly over the last two to three years due to security, political instability and Talibanization especially in KPK and Baluchistan. Currently population size is 164.77mn showing a constant rise with the depleting resources where per capita income for financial year is \$1,085. Inflation rate is rocketing sky high where consumer price index is 24.52% (July-sep '2010).

Inequities, driven by overwhelming poverty are affecting both male and female in Pakistan. Cultural traditions, negligible economic resources and limited opportunities put females at disadvantage while their male counterparts of the society has better access to health care, nutrition and education. Gender bias is reinforced throughout adulthood as men retain economic and political power. Adolescents reach adulthood in societies that undervalue the contributions of women and perpetuate harmful gender stereotypes. The females are participating in the labour force due to economic pressures despite the widening gaps of education and social systems between males and females. Most of women's time is spent in the non-wage economy (informal economy), creating a social misperception that women's work has no economic value. Social discrimination among urban and rural women in Pakistan complicates the social structure and completely jeopardizes the women growth patterns. In rural Punjab, less than 1 percent of girls aged 10 to 14 earn wages, compared to 4 percent of boys the same age. Three percent of women aged 15 to 39 earn salaries or are self-employed compared to 41 percent of men. Female literacy in Pakistan improves about 5 percent per decade, at which rate it will take 60 years to raise the literacy rate of teenage women age 15 to 19 to 70 percent. The gender gap in primary school enrolment in Pakistan rose by 30 percent between 1985 and 1995. (Afza, T., Rashid M.A)

Participation of females in labour force is increasing and Pakistan is no exception. But their participation is not quantitatively improved both in home and in the labour market. Gender gap remains substantial where females are channeled in to low pay offs. Worldwide economic and social development over the past decade has not translated into comparative gains for females. Limited options and formidable barriers like low investment in their education, poor access to services and assets restrict their options. Occupational segregation channels them into less productive and less remunerative segments of the labour market.

In order to be considered fit for the top position a woman is expected to show toughness and authority considered masculine persona but acting those is considered undesirable and unsuitable. Therefore, she is in a no-win situation. One such double bind is called the femininity-competency bind. Furthermore it will be explained that why there are few women at top level such as pipeline theories that say that time and supply are to blame for this (Forbes, Piercy, & Hayes, 1998) and deficit theories that say that females deficient characteristics disallow them to play traditional masculine roles. (Feuer, 1998).

Literature Review

Stereotypes are said to have a traditional image toward a certain object, person or phenomenon etc and these beliefs about characteristics of man and women are permanent and are proved to be resistant to change (Dodge, Gilroy & Fenzel, 1995; Leutow, Garovich, & Leutow, 1995). Male and females are thought to be different both in terms of achievement-oriented traits referred as agentic and in terms of social-and-service oriented traits referred as communal (Bakan, 1966). Males are characterized by aggressive, forceful, independent and decisive traits whereas females are characterized as kind, helpful, sympathetic and concerned for others.

(Medline E. Heilman, 2001) so, a person may have excess of masculine or feminine traits in his/her personality terming it feminine or masculine (Bem, 1981a). Among various dimensions of personality masculinity and femininity are the most studied ones leading to further investigation of gender–role identity that is individual’s basic sense regarding femininity and masculinity (Bem, 1974, 1981b; Cook, 1985; Hetherington, 1965). Gender role is defined as the behaviours, expectations and general functions defined by society as masculine or feminine, which are embodied in the behaviour of the individual male or female and culturally regarded as appropriate male and female. (O’Neil, 1981b. p.203) Females are characterized as less agentic than males due to prevailing stereotypes about men and women in the working and nonworking environment. (Heilman, Block, & Martell, 1995.) During study they found female managers efficient and more decisive than general females but still they were rated lower than their counterparts. It was only when female managers were considered as highly successful that this gender difference in trait characterization was found to abate. But, increased presence of female in the workforce and their assumptions of new roles do not appear to preclude gender-stereotype perceptions (Medline E. Heilman, 2001).

Gender stereotype can hinder females from going up the ladder as the executive level jobs are always considered to be masculine. It means these jobs are considered for people who are tough, authoritative with more decisive powers and more achievement oriented which are considered male characteristics. So the top level job description is invariably defined as masculine based upon factors like work domain and specific area of management. Certain findings and research indicate that a description of a good manager is attributed by masculinity (Heilman, Block, Martell, & Simon, 1989) and all masculine attributes are required for a successful manager. So not only the top level management but good management is said to be a manly business. The typical stereotype attitude and the above mentioned approach is creating gender biasness while evaluating the jobs. So, perception and expectation about how successful or unsuccessful a person would be in particular job is the underlying reason of personal decision. Individual characteristics and job requirements matching with each other in terms of skills and abilities determine these performance expectations. If the perceived fit in expectations and current traits is poor than failure expected will affect valuation process in return. There are certain organizational situations which affect the evaluation process as well.

Organizational conditions that promote devaluation in female performance are vague valuation criteria, lack of structure in valuation processes and denying of credit to females for their work. Research shows often same work output by males and females is regarded inferior for later when judged due to stereotype attitude forbidding females’ in their respective role which is considered for males only (Shore,1992, Eagly et al, 1992). The same task performed carries different meanings to both the genders like taking time for decision making before action is taken is thought as passive in females and prudent in males. Lack of quality in performance evaluation suggests and promotes biasness in the devaluation of females’ performance. Ambiguity in evaluation criteria taking a step further recommends that more imprecise the judgment criteria the more easily the information can be distorted to fit predetermined ideas.(PAGE 663) As added assumptions are drawn from performance information so it is likely that biasness will enter into the evaluation judgment. Structure of the evaluation process can also pose threat as uncertainty would bring cognition distortion.

Females are often denied for the credit of their work as tasks are considered manly and due to the perception of being less skilled (Deaux, 1976). They are denied for success for various reasons like lack of knowledge about sources of successful performance which can probably occur in teams and in upward mobility as it is thought that females who are successful are beneficiaries of affirmative actions and they simply enjoy high status due to their membership in privileged group.

Sometimes women are penalized for being competent as whenever they try to rupture the glass ceiling hostility is generated towards them. Similar competency is applauded in men while taken negatively in females (Horner, 1972). Heilman in her article identifies two different aspects of gender stereotypes- the descriptive and the prescriptive. Descriptive aspect promotes gender bias because of discrepancy between the stereotype conceptions of what females as groups are like and of what upper level managerial jobs entail. This leads to expectations that females will be unable to perform such jobs effectively. This generates negativity towards female competence either through devaluing her performance or attributing something else to her skills and ability. The perspective aspect does not dictates what females as groups are like but rather what female as groups should be like. Females who prove to be competent at a male task violate their normative perception and thus arouse disapproval and are penalized. This penalty is evident in the form of pay discrimination based on the gender of typical job incumbent and not solely on the basis of the characteristics of the work performed (Jaffery S. Hornsby et al, 1987). With the changing environment it is becoming more and more difficult for the business organizations to operate especially in the knowledge intensive sector like labour market. So it is accurate to predict that mismanagement of human capital will cause organizations heavily.

In an economy where gap between supply and demand is posing threats to the organization to maintain its productivity and efficiency they need to cater the issue pertaining to social fairness among their labour market. With particular focus on gendered employment patterns greater transparency is required in terms of pay trends and performance evaluations (Jude Brown, & Simon Deakin, 2004). Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is becoming well admired method which enhances public services, corporate responsibility, improved development & social policy. Assumption is that organizations are social entities and therefore responsible for conducting business in an ethical manner catering the needs of society at large moving away from narrow economic concern to incorporate a “triple bottom line” commitment, i.e. ‘profits’ (economic), ‘people’ (social) and ‘planet’ (environmental), (Clint Le Bruyns, 2007). In an attempt to define corporate social responsibility and its effect on corporate social performance, three dimension model was devised, social issues an organization must address and organization’s philosophy or mode of social responsiveness (Carrol, 1979). Ioanna Boulouta has regarded corporate social responsibility (CSR) is included under the more comprehensive theory of corporate social performance (CSP) and has argued that presence of females on board positively affects the CSP and on financial performance as a result.

Research Methodology

The achievements of working women in all fields of life are witnessed all around the globe and same trend can be observed in Pakistan. Female participation in workforce has changed traditional perception regarding female reality which has increased the researchers’ interest to analyze the impact of these conventional roles on perceived characteristics which are considered imperative for a successful manager in an organizational setting (TH). The prime objective of this research is to see how concept of corporate social responsibility can help changing traditional perceptions about both genders, a major cause of biasness in the workforce and hence females are facing glass ceiling.

Geographical area covered for research was Sahiwal city where different sectors were selected like

- Education,
- Banking
- Automobile industry
- Telecommunication
- Food

Research was conducted in various organizations of the city where chosen organizations were picked up due to their awareness on CSR. In Sahiwal there are very few institutes providing masters level degrees. The names include Bahauddin Zakaria University’s Campus, Govt. College for Women and COMSATS Institute of Information Technology- the only institute providing management science discipline. We chose COMSATS institute of information technology from the education sector due to its faculty’s more relevance and knowledge of the issue. Managers of various banks like Bank Alfalah, Faysal Bank and Meezan were also included in the research. In telecom sector responses were gathered from Warid, Moboilink and Zong. Other responses from Hyundai from automobile sector and Kings & Queens from the food sector.

Our target population included working class males and females mostly at managerial level with good educational backgrounds. Respondents were both young and middle aged people. Data was collected with the help of questionnaires and most of the respondents were contacted personally by the researchers to ensure accuracy and avoid ambiguity in the data collection process. Sample size was not very large due to different limitations.

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents by Level of Education

Level	Frequency	Percentage
Post graduate	2	7.69
Masters	21	80.77
Bachelors	2	7.69
Intermediate	1	3.85
Matriculation	0	0.00
	26	100.00

Before distribution of questionnaires a Pilot test was held among 5 to 6 people to remove discrepancies. At first it was thought to include only females in the sample but then to reduce biasness in the results males were also included.

The respondents of the study were selected based on their specialized area and academic qualifications. The scope of the study was to investigate masculine and feminine traits of the workforce, their perception of a successful manager and gender as a barrier to the key managerial positions. Based upon logical connection between critical variables following hypothesis were generated.

- In masculine societies females would be more feminine and males would be more masculine
- Those with masculine type of personality (Male or Female) would rate successful managers' traits as more masculine
- Masculinity considered a successful trait would cause biases in the workforce

Questionnaire was built in three parts to cater all three scenarios. Each section carried around 15 questions to get the proper answer.

Results

Based on the information available through questionnaires following were the findings;

- Respondents included both males and females. Female's participation remained 57.69% while males constituted 42.31% of the total population size.

Table 3: Distribution of Respondents by Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Males	11	42.31
Females	15	57.69
Total	26	100.00

- Different elements were explored to check personality type. Level of independence in decision making, level of consultation and Assertiveness was investigated to see individual personality traits. Most of the females were low in their independence and assertiveness while high in consultation.
- To find the reliability and consistency of the instrument cronbach's alpha test was applied on the data which was found highly reliable ranging from maximum 0.815 to minimum 0.810.
- Both of males and females were tested for their masculine and feminine type of personality. Men were more almost 65-70% masculine with having 30-35% feminine traits as well. But their perception about males was masculine only although results suggested otherwise.
- On the other hand females were more feminine 67% and there were 33% females who had masculine traits. Their perception about how a female should be was not very clear due to ambiguity in different dimensions of personality inherent due to how women should be and how women are.
- This confirmed to the traditional approach of society and stereotype attitude of people towards females that despite males had feminine traits their acceptance was quite negligible.
- Then managers of both genders accepted that top level positions demand not only to be aggressive and prudent but also to be considerate as well, a feminine trait.
- Although managers had both types of personalities and their opinion about top positions was quite similar still males' perception about females at being higher level was quite indifferent.
- Managers opinion about gender issues varied widely as problems which were causing stress and tension among females were not an issue for male managers at all.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Age

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
20-30	18	69.23
31-40	7	26.92
41-50	1	3.85
Total	26	100.00

- When authority of opposite gender was observed in an organization, 30.79% (50% Males and 50% females) disagreed while 42.3% (18.1% males and 81.8% females) agreed while 26.92% were indifferent.
- More than 80% of female respondents agreed that they are not considered for important projects because of their sex type.
- 38.46% of population agreed (10% males and 90% females) that they are not part of the decision making process while 61.54% disagreed (62.5% males and 37.5% females).
- It was observed that less consideration was given to female contribution while evaluating jobs and they thought that their work is not valued in the organization.
- Almost 50% of respondents (54% males and 46% females) thought that gender biasness was not their issue, 30.76% agreed (37.6% males and 62.4% females) and 19.23% were indecisive.
- Various dimensions of corporate social responsibility were explored like job evaluation process, equal distribution of resources, empowerment and gender discrimination.

- Females were negatively perceived as leaders and neglecting was causing stress. Females and males are treated differently as males are more respected and nurtured while females with disrespect and their authority questioned. This was causing chaos among the workforce and hence hampering organizational performance.

Conclusion and recommendations

It was seen that females are facing a lot of problems which are inherent in the system and usually come with the traditional perception of males and females. It was observed in our study that those inherent attitudes come from society and nations like Pakistan where traditionally males are considered masculine and females as feminine. This mindset and perception further leads to selection of people at top level who are considered 'masculine'. This perception is generating biasness and generating negative vibes among the weaker part of the society i.e. females. Here comes the role of corporations as they need to address the issues which are directly related with the job performance because both genders are part of the organization and they must be treated equally. Corporate social responsibility is to devise measures like fairness in job evaluation which is usually based upon the perceptions of the person evaluating the job. More emphasis should be given to job evaluation process because this is the key point that helps employees to step up the ladder.

Corporations' responsibility increases in societies like us where people have a typical approach towards gender and their responsibilities. So the need of training and education arise more profoundly. It is imperative that people develop their personality in their childhood learning from their surroundings but they are in the developing stage, an important indication which organizations should not forgo and must provide employees proper environment and guidelines. Job evaluation further leads to equal distribution of resources which further guides to empowerment as more authority and decision making are provided to employees.

Limitations

There were limitations inherent with the research process starting from sampling to data collection. Some of the boundaries are discussed under

- Researcher was a full time employee of COMSATS Institute of Information Technology, therefore it was difficult rather impossible for him to go to other cities and collect data which they wanted to get themselves to reduce biases and ambiguities. So, the geographical area covered was Sahiwal only.
- Due to above mentioned reason time constraint forced to take sample of population of Sahiwal city only.
- Being a small city Sahiwal there are limited number of corporate level organizations with well equipped and educated personnel. So, our research was forced to concentrate few organizations available.
- Here very few females are seen at managerial level which was one of the criteria of respondents' selection so sample size is quite small.
- As fewer numbers of female participants were available so male respondents were also included to get better objectives.

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