Talent Management of Women: The Journey so far

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Abstract
Increasingly more importance is being paid to having more gender balanced leadership within corporations by having more women in decision making roles. However, women can’t reach the board if they opt out somewhere in between, as they find corporations too rigid to attain career success. Past research suggests that women look at career success much more differently than men do. In this context, focused efforts to identify, develop and progress women can become a strategic differentiator in the talent strategy of a firm.

So what is already known about talent management of managerial women? Why is there need for specific talent management frameworks with appreciation of gender differences? How should organizations develop their women talent and create paths and ladders for them? What specific approaches, frameworks are already available available to manage women careers? What is the relevant body of empirical research and knowledge available to base future related research in this area?

This paper aims to answer the above questions through a literature review of extant and existing literature in this area for the more than three decades starting from 1984 till date. Based on literature review, the emerging themes from the core contributions in these areas are summarized in this paper. The paper highlights few common themes that have continued to generate the interest of researchers over all three decades. These include research around career success factors and paths, career development models and frameworks with focus on women. It also puts forth few key emerging areas of research in the last two decades which provide insights for talent management of women like research around Women in boards, Inclusive talent management and Diversity at a workplace. Finally, this paper provides direction for possible future avenues of related research in the wider context of talent and diversity management.

Key Words: Women leadership; Talent Management of Women; Gender Diversity; Inclusive Leadership

Type of Paper: Literature Review

Introduction

While there have been changes in economic and social status and roles of women, certain beliefs regarding women in leadership roles seem to persist and these beliefs apparently continue to flourish across cultures (Fullager et al., 2003; Prime et al., 2008). Eagly and Carli (2007) have suggested how women need to the navigate their careers through a “labyrinth,” of obstacles and barriers. Despite
Globalization and dramatic changes in economic and social status of women in industrialized economies (Stedham and Yamamura, 2004), there still exists a huge challenge when it comes to having gender balanced leadership within corporations. Women lead in only 2 per cent of Fortune 500 companies and in only five of those companies listed on the Financial Times Stock Exchange 100 stock index (The Economist, 2010). The glass ceilings for women still persist for senior management roles.

Effective talent management could be the answer to growing and nurturing leaders of both genders equally. Talent management includes attracting the best candidates possible (“How a talent management plan”, 2004; Sullivan, 2005), training and development interventions to encourage ingrown talent (Cohn, Khurana, & Reeves, 2005, p. 64), use of fair compensation and performance management processes (Garger, 1999), as well as effective leadership development and succession planning. (Conger & Fulmer, 2003).

Inclusive talent management is an emerging area of research and comprises of various elements like attracting talent from diverse backgrounds, equality proofing recruitment processes, creating ways to reach out and engage with different workforce segments, defining effective ways to identify internal talent from diverse backgrounds, introducing appropriate talent management interventions. (Promoting Equality, Valuing Diversity, which I launched with the Cabinet Secretary, Sir Gus O’ Donnell, in July 2008)

**Why men and women talent need to be differentiated?**

Prior research in this area indicates difference in careers of women and men could be attributed to developmental differences among men and women as well as societal Factors (Powell and Maneiro, 1992)

While career motivation and need for challenging jobs are same for men and women at the beginning of their careers, however, their work experience w.r.t. receiving feedback, opportunities to interact and draw from bosses was lesser (Cox and Harquail, 1991) Other personal issues like childrearing (Hewlett 2002) and dual careers (Hothschild 1989) have a far higher impact on women’s careers than on their male counterparts.

Already existing literature around women and careers suggest the following patterns (O’Neil et al 2008)

- Women view families and careers both at central to their lives.
- Larger life contexts of women do impact their careers.
- Career paths chosen by women reflect wide range and variety of patterns.
- Human and social capital are critical factors for women’s careers

Barriers to advancement of women could be organizational, societal, and governmental. Empirical research indicates organizational barriers to be either in the form of failure to recruit, develop, support, performance manage or in the form of hostile and gender biased environment. Glass ceiling has been relocated and is now positioned at a higher level so that young women, through hard work and effort, break through lesser barriers lower down the hierarchy but encounter the glass ceiling at or beyond senior management.

From a firm’s talent management philosophy, this has implications both in terms of women being spotted as talent as well as in terms of creating talent offerings and career paths for them, after they are spotted as talent.
Talent Management

This widely talked about concept was coined by Mc Kinsey & Co. in 1997 in the book ‘War for Talent’. While “talent management” has been a popular term in industry and practitioner reports and articles, there are limited peer-reviewed, researched-based findings around talent management. Multiple definitions touching upon diverse dimensions make it difficult to be understood in an integrative fashion. It does seem to be a repackaged concept of end to end HR challenges around attracting, developing and retaining talent.

Popular books written by practitioners propose broad concepts for managing talent talk about linking people to business strategy, creating talent pipeline and integrated talent management are illustrated by pictorial models, analogies and anecdotes that are otherwise unsupported. Most tend to simply draw from and reorganize related research rooted solidly in academic literature like selection instruments, goal setting, performance feedback, job rotation. So talent management, as defined currently, is not well grounded in research.

There seems to be no singular strategy and way of driving effective talent management within organizations as each firm would have different talent objectives and requirements for current and future talent pipeline. Most firms manage talent by focusing on select group of employees -high potential and managerial employees. Inclusive ‘whole workforce’ talent strategies remain quite rare.(Reflections on Talent Management, CIPD, 2006)

Inclusive talent management practices are being explored (Gus O’ Donnell, 2008) and managerial women would be a key workforce segment to manage talent pipeline in large global organizations. In Winning the War for Talent in Emerging Markets, Sylvia Ann Hewlett and Ripa Rashid assert that the answer for talent crunch in global multigeography firms lies in tapping the brain power of millions of educated women available in Brazil, India, Russia, China and UAE. They come with better credentials, higher ambitions and greater loyalty than their male peers. Few strategies presented in this book m to manage these women talent are through sustaining their ambition through stretch opportunities and international assignments, combating cultural bias by building an infrastructure of networks, mentors, sponsors for encouraging female leadership, introducing flexible work arrangements to accommodate family obligations and providing safe transportation.

Since literature review of talent management unable to establish adequate academic empirical research around talent management, extant and existing literature in closely linked areas of ‘Women and Careers’ and ‘Diversity’ we explored to draw common linkages.

Women and Careers

Career is defined as the unfolding sequence of a person’s work experience over time. (Arthur, Hall and Lawrence, 1989). The boundaryless career concept, does not characterize any single career form, but, rather a range of possible forms that defies traditional employment assumptions. If is different from ‘bounded career’ or organizational career, which sees people in orderly employment arrangements achieved through vertical coordination in mainly large, stable, firms (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996). Body of extant literature and research around women and careers can be traced back to 1984 with Astin post which more avenues for research opened up. In the last decade women research mushroomed with various research papers by Padavic and Reskin 2002, Powell and Graves 2003, Vinnicombe and Colwill 1995. Few focused journals that contributed significantly to an increasingly body of knowledge around this agenda are ‘Equal Opportunities International’, ‘Gender, Work and Organization’, ‘Sex Roles’ and ‘Women in Management Review’ (D Billimoria, 2006)

Various broad categories of research can be summarized as the following (Maneiro and O Neil, 2005):
• Research based on male career models in extant literature applied to women careers
• Research around comparative studies of men and women in similar occupations in order to study career success, motivations, outcomes
• Theoretical frameworks, concepts and theories touching upon one or more facets of women careers
• Integrated approaches to career concepts and models that looks at harmonizing personal, family and professional factors that influence careers of women

Every credible and reliable international measurement of women’s progress shows inequality in women’s participation and representation in the labour market, in management, and in governance, across both the developed and developing worlds (McGregor, 2010)

While a review of extant literature from 1990 to present indicates that Male dominated constructions of work and career success continue to dominate organizational research and practice. (O’Neil et al 2008), there were strides made by researchers in pioneering some women specific career concepts and focused research. Contributions of few key papers which point towards managing women talent at a workplace, have been summarized below in Table A.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE A</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Context</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Working towards a theory of women’s career development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author, Yr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larwood &amp; Gutek (1987)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five key factors that impact women’s career development which are Career preparation, Availability of opportunities, Marriage, Pregnancy and Child Rearing and finally the effect of time and age of career breaks which result in different career patterns of timing compared to men.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploring Women’s development: Implications for career theory, practice, research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gallos 1989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handbook of career theory, Cambridge University Press</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career theories were built on male models of success with assumption of centrality of work to one’s identity and a notion that maturity involves separation from others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross-Currents in the River of Time: Conceptualizing the Complexities of Women's Careers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author, Yr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powell and Maneiro (1992)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Publication</td>
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<tr>
<td>Journal of Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Understanding women careers is significantly different than from men with respect to four elements: (1) Includes non-work and work issues(2) Use objective and subjective measures of career success(3) Includes influence of peers, organizational, societal factors on women’s career choices and outcomes (4) Doesn’t assume predictable sequences over time periods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women Managers Moving on: Exploring Career and Life Choices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author, Yr</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marshall 1995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publication</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thomson Learning, London. ISBN 0415097398</td>
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<tr>
<td>Findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unlike Men, Women express their professional self over a life time as they are driven by attachment to others and their development. Paper emphasizes centrality of relationships, attachments, and caring. These affect women’s outlooks and the way they make life choices.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Benefits of Multiple Roles for Managerial Women
Ruderman and Ohlott (2002)
Acad Manage Journal
Phases of career development of women may not have linear and predictable character of men’s and may use a broader range of criteria for evaluating their choices than men.

Women’s career development phases, Idealism, endurance, and reinvention
O’Neil & Billimoria, 2005
Career Development International
Three gender related factors explain the contextual dynamics facing women in organizations
-Continued under representation of women at top i.e. Token status – stereotyping
-Inability of organizations to adjust work structures and success criteria to account for Women’s life and family responsibilities as primary caregivers uniquely impacts their advancement.

Also, there seems to have been some significant progress on research toward more integrated career models suitable for nonlinear career choices of women. Early research on career models mainly took into consideration linear careers more suited for males like the Super and Schien model. In the recent past, and some concepts like Protean Careers and Kaleidoscope Career models have been introduced to pay attention to nonlinear career paths. These models as mentioned in Table B, appear to be suited to be applied on future research around managing women talent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Author, Yr</th>
<th>Publication</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The protean career: A quarter-century journey</td>
<td>Hall, 2004</td>
<td>Journal of Vocational Behaviour</td>
<td>The protean career is conceptualized as an individualized, self-directed career guided by personal values and subjective measures of success.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using the Kaleidoscope Career Model to Understand the Changing Patterns of Women's Careers: Designing HRD Programs That Attract and Retain Women</td>
<td>Mainiero and Sullivan’s, 2006</td>
<td>Advances in Developing Human Resources</td>
<td>Kaleidoscope career model (KCM) describes how careers are created by individuals as they make decisions based on the shifting importance of challenge, balance, and authenticity across their lifetime. This is very relevant to non-sequential careers women pursue.</td>
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**Diversity**

Diversity can refer to the given categories into which individuals fit at birth such as race, ethnicity, class, nationality and gender, or it may refer to the voluntary categories that individuals adopt over time (Albelda, Drago & Shulman, 2010). Gender is a dimension of diversity that is nearly universal in being identified around the world for diversity and inclusion initiatives. In fact, in some countries, this is the only component of diversity that organizations addressed in diversity training, as the changing role of women in the workplace becomes an increasingly important issue (Goodman, 2013).

New developments in diversity theorizing stressed the value of the heterogeneity of group differences and challenged the view that difference was essentialist (Ely and Thomas, 2001). Diversity
management focuses on a strategy corrected approach which recognizes worker individuality and believes in the benefits of diversity to organizations. It is not intended to guarantee the integration of minorities in a dominant culture, but to challenge managerial practices so that everyone can succeed by being true to him/herself. (Liff, 1999; Walby, 2007). Few key contributions in the area of Diversity from which insights for talent management of women could be drawn are summarized below in TABLE C.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Author, Yr</th>
<th>Publication</th>
<th>Findings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women as a business imperative</td>
<td>Schwartz 1992</td>
<td>Harvard Business Review</td>
<td>Empirical findings indicate that firms who aggressively recruit, train, promote, reward, and value women continue to would attract the brightest women as well as connect deeply with men and women who resonate with the issue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workforce Diversity Status: A Study of Employee Reactions</td>
<td>Kundu 2003</td>
<td>Industrial Management and Data Systems</td>
<td>Females believed that they had less chances of receiving work facilities, promotions and salary increases than male counterparts. If organizations want to be excellent organizations, they have to hire and retain more women, minority and other categories of employees.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Promotion of Workforce Diversity             | Rajan, 2006 | Human Resource Management International Digest | Two key factors that led to growing interest in diversity.  
1) Globalization is bringing different categories of customers to the market place, prompting organizations to review whether their workforce profile to mirror their customer profile.  
2) Corporate restructuring and resultant focus on the creation of more vibrant cultures. In the past companies have had very little success in this area and many have recognized that this was very much the result of what one could describe as a predominantly “male, stale and pale” workforce. Existing literature throws some substantial challenges for large organizations around gender diversity.  
1) The first is management style, which can have a very negative impact if inappropriate. For example, many managers have no idea how to deal with senior women, tending to treat them like secretaries.  
2) Second, managers are often very autocratic which can crush innovation. Third, few managers really Lead by example due time pressures and also fail to listen to the workforce. In large companies the bigger challenge than attracting women is getting the best out of them. |

Hence, carefully examining literature in the area diversity and inclusion, throws multiple perspectives of enablers that could be created to empower and leverage management styles of women which in turn could help women managers grow within an organization.
Conclusions

This literature review paper focused on reviewing existing literature reviews, qualitative and empirical research conducted in the last three decades, which relates to managing women talent in organizations. To draw meaningfully around existing literature and work further on approaches and models to manage women talent in the current context, it is important to look at few distinct areas of enquiry within the existing literature. This paper identifies three such distinct, yet interrelated streams of research: Existing literature on talent management, Extant literature on Women and Careers and emerging body of research around Workforce Diversity. These have strong linkages to each other, as well as each individually each of them strongly drives the business case for managing women talent. Literature review in these streams of research reveals that while there are enough industry and practitioner reports in the area of talent management, there is limited academic and empirical research. These findings logically led to exploring more work within existing literature in interrelated core areas of HR like Women Careers, Diversity which seem to be much better researched areas with various concepts, tools and theoretical frameworks available in existing body of literature. This could form the basis for future research, especially around creating gender inclusive talent management processes.

Furthermore, the review of literature spanning across three decades pointed towards few common themes of research in all three decades. These include research around Career Success of women and Career development models and frameworks for women. From one decade to the other, we saw this area of work strengthening both with respect to geographies and scope, as well with respect to concrete findings and models which could be leveraged by workplaces. Between 1984 to 1994, we saw research specifically around sociopsychological career psychology of women and comparative studies of women. In the next decade i.e. 1995 to 2005, research focus was retained around differing career paths of men and women. Additionally, there was more research available around barriers and obstacles for women to progress at a workplace. In this decade, we also saw emerging topics of research around women on boards and gender gap in executive suite. In the years following 2006, research around Business Case for women strengthened both with respect to established findings and with respect to being conducted in different geographies. Also, in this period more concrete models of career development were proposed by researchers, like Protean Career, Kaleidoscope Career Model that could be leveraged towards developing and growing women in the workforce. Few new emerging areas of research emerged like inclusive talent management and diversity. The findings of these could easily be used for strengthening our understanding of effective talent management of women in the workforce, today.
Directions for Future Research:

- There is scope for more research around integrated talent management frameworks focused on leadership development and could be considered by future researchers.
- Most of the extant research is from developed countries i.e. UK, and US, so clearly there is more scope for exploring into these areas of enquiry within emerging countries. Clearly, there is limited research done in India around talent management of women.
- Moving from fragmented streams of work to integrated thought processes which take into account intersection of studies spread over Women and Career, Diversity and Talent Management is an area of possible exploration for researchers.
- There is scope to test nonlinear career theories like Kaleidoscope Career Model and Protean Career theories, that are relevant for women’s contemporary lives conceptualizing career success, in different socio cultural contexts like India and other BRIC nations.
- Interesting empirical research can also be undertaken for Cross geography studies, comparative studies between developed and developing countries

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