

④ **"WHO IS WHO AND WHERE?"**
A GENDER ANALYSIS OF SRI LANKAN
MANAGERS

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Extended abstract

Introduction

The prominence of the presence of female managers in Sri Lankan organizations has become a characteristic feature today so much so that they have gained a distinct image in the labour market segmentation process (Iddamalgodala, 1991; Fagenson, 1993). The gender and organization literature suggests some of the likely reasons influencing the presence of female managers in organizations. This paper analyses such issues in a Sri Lankan setting relating to gender, management and the workplace.

Methodology

The sample for the study consisted of 382 male and female managers holding top, middle, and junior level management positions from 134 diverse Sri Lankan organizations. It analyses the gender dimension using characteristics such as occupational title, industry-service, public-private sector, organizational size (employee number), recruitment channel, life context score and marital status classifications of male and female managers.

Issues

The first issue relates to the finding that although the number of female managers has increased over the years, their presence in the highest management levels is still scarce (Meyerson and Fletcher, 2000). The literature reports that the proverbial 'glass ceiling' disadvantages female managers from entering the highest echelons of management. Applying this issue to the Sri Lankan setting, the findings illustrate the likely reasons for this phenomenon. What are these reasons? For example, do female managers have a slower career in relation to their male counterparts? Looking at the comparative titles/designations of a sample of male and female managers holding top-management positions, the paper looks at the diverse issues that can impinge on career progress of female managers. In sum the question here is "Who are the people at the top management levels?"

The second issue takes a different perspective – shedding some more light to the previous question. This issue is on the type of organization in which the female managers are working. Looking at the sample of Sri Lankan male and female managers, the paper looks at the presence of managers across public and private sector organizations. The issue here is which of the two sectors – private or public – does one find greater presence of female managers? In sum the question here is "Where are the managers employed – in terms of the sector?"

The third issue looks at yet another dimension – it gives a picture of male and female managers across the type of industry/service sector. It highlights the likely 'woman-friendliness' scale. For example, if female managers appear to be present in only a few types of workplace (industry), there can be several issues relating to it. One is gender-segregation (sex-segregation), where the assumption is that females enter into jobs that have little scope for advancement – irrespective of the industry they are in. In sum the question here again, is "Where are the managers employed – in terms of the type of industry?"

Looking closer at the issue of occupational segregation, an analysis of the titles and designations of middle managers in the sample of Sri Lankan managers provides further insights. The gender analysis shows the comparative male and female cross-section of diverse management areas where the managers held their positions. The analysis looks at areas such as, human resources, finance, marketing, administration, information technology, and the like. In sum the question here again, is "Where are the people employed – in terms of the type of work they do?"

Another perspective relates to organizational demographics. What are the likely characteristics of organizations that employ female managers? Are they the ones employing a large number of employees or the medium-sized or small ones? One proposition would be that larger organizations are more likely to have female managers because of the larger number of employees. This paper provides a comparative insight into where male and female managers are present. In sum the question here is "Where are the managers employed – in terms of the number of employees of the organization?"

Another feature of how female managers enter the managerial positions of organizations relates to the mode of recruitment or the channel of recruitment. While male managers appear to have access to both the formal and informal channels of recruitment, female managers can face certain hurdles in the formal mode resulting in their preference towards more informal channels of recruitment. This paper analyses this aspect as well. In sum the question here again, is "Where are the managers employed – in terms of how they entered the organization?"

The local as well as global literature on gender and organization highlights the majority of those holding positions of authority are either single or single parents. For example, in Powell's (1988) study of American organisations, single women (never married, widowed, separated or divorced) accounted for 42 per cent of all women managers while only 25 per cent of male managers were single. Similarly, in a British Institute of Management survey, in Europe only 58 per cent of women managers were married whereas among men 93 per cent were married. Among the married women, only half had children, while 90 per cent of men had children (Vinnicombe and Sturges, 1995). The Sri Lankan research concurs with this finding (for example, Weathersby, 1987; Obeysekere, 1987). In this paper, the life context score of male and female managers will be analysed. In sum the question here again, is "Who are they – in terms of their life context score?"

Findings

There were a greater number of female managers having a relatively 'non-traditional' designation/title in comparison with their male counterparts. Nevertheless, there appeared to be more or less an equal share of directors, general managers and deputy general managers. This finding suggests that female managers appear to hold top management positions in unique domains in diverse organizations.

There appears to be a greater level of presence of male managers in industry, in line with the global scene. In contrast, male and female managers appear to share their ranks in all three levels in contexts where the organization is a service provider or belongs to both industry and service. This finding suggests that exclusive industrial organizations are still apparently male dominated.

The public sector appears to attract a relatively larger number of female managers into its managerial positions. In the private sector the numbers are close to equal parity levels – where there appears to be a fair share of male and female managers. Although this finding might appear to be confounded as a result of the number of unidentifiable cases, one can conclude that the inherent characteristics of private sector management can deter female managers from entering such organizations.

Looking at the occupational segregation among middle level managers, male managers had a single largest share in marketing while their female counterparts had their majority share in finance. Nevertheless, there were male and female managers in both these areas. There can be possible cues that might suggest reasons for phenomena – such as the nature of the job – indoor v outdoors, for example. However a complete generalizations cannot be made in this case. The same finding appears to be the case in relation to the presence of female managers and the size of the workforce of the organization. In some cases though, there appears to be a tendency to conclude that bigger the organization, the more likely there is a female manager there.

Female managers, especially at senior and top-management levels appear to have entered organizations using relatively informal channels or modes than did their junior counterparts. This finding suggests that female managers have employment ‘networks’ of their own. The formal recruitment channel such as advertisements and employment agencies appears to be their second alternative.

The life context score, a re-coded variable that includes marital status, the number and ages of dependent children, and whether the manager is the sole/principal breadwinner or not, in the Sri Lankan sample, is in line with the international literature. Female managers have higher life context scores, suggesting that they are single and/or single parents and that they are the sole/principal breadwinners in their households. Male managers, on the other hand, have a greater likelihood to have partners to look after their dependent children – where their life context scores are less than the index 3.

Conclusion

This paper looks at where male and female managers are employed in organization on the basis of certain personal and organizational demographic attributes. It deals with designations/titles, industry-service, public– private sectors, organizational size (workforce), occupational segregation and recruitment channels. An in-depth analysis of such attributes help managers, policy-makers and academics gather insights into the issues that encourage and discourage male and female managers in their career and employment choices.

While there are certain areas of convergence in the managerial workplace, there are areas of divergence as well.

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