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THE ROLE OF GENDER-NEUTRAL POLICY IN INDIAN WOMEN'S PROGRESS AND LEADERSHIP

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Abstract

This research focuses on understanding how policies with or without gender-neutrality element helps in shaping the landscape and journey of women's progress and leadership. In today's competitive world, both men and women are treated at par eliminating the gender-stereotyping barriers. In the process of promoting gender-equity and gender-neutrality, organizations are facing challenges and ethical dilemmas. Support to the target group for ensuring transparency, fairness, inclusivity and ethicality is crucial in the long run. Every organisation should adopt a balanced approach towards gender related issues for effective governance and ensuring the women's progress without compromising to the needs of men at the same time.

This research paper aims to analyse the impact of gender-neutral policy in men and women with respect to pay, promotion and opportunity of leadership which has contributed and will continue to effect Indian women's progress. 100 men and 100 women have been taken for this survey. Opinions over merit and historic injustice to women have also given due importance. Garrett Ranking method has been used for this analysis. Sample comprises of employees of all cadres from small, medium and large-scale organisations, companies, educational institutes, sports, defence, administrative fields. The results of this analysis will pave the way for progress of women in future by revising the existing norms of gender neutrality, by using hybrid policy and still advocating gender equity.

Keywords

Gender-neutrality, hybrid policy, ethical dilemma, gender equity, Indian women's progress and leadership.

Introduction

Breaking the glass ceiling is considered more challenging when it comes to women's progress and leadership. Implementation of the policies for supporting women's progress and leadership in the long run without disturbing the set norms of gender equity in any organisation plays an important role.

Gender-neutral policies are those rules and regulations in any organisation which are formed on the foundation of providing equal opportunity to the people irrespective of gender and the decision of recruitment, promotions, leadership opportunities and pay are not affected by the gender preferences. The decision making includes and is based on merit, quality, equality and fairness. Due consideration is given not to disadvantage any gender in the process.

We all are equal irrespective of any gender and we should be treated equal in all terms and context. But in the process, if we fail to acknowledge disadvantaged or vulnerable class of people for the sake of strict implementation of gender-neutrality aiming at gender-equity, it

may result in expanding the gap inadvertently rather than bridging the gap as there are certain structural and historical disadvantages which can not be ignored and must be considered while implementing any policy or approach.

Previous research indicate that women possess specific attributes, skills, virtues to make a proper balance of feminine and masculine qualities in their work and leadership style. Vasavada T. through her study on non-profit organisation opines that women's unique abilities and not just the confirmatory style of their male counterparts, make the women, great transformatory team members and leaders across all the diverse areas and fields in India. Several research have pointed out that companies with female members on their board and strong women leaders governing them are more successful. Available data shows that female participation in executive committee and on boards is quite low in India close to 3 percentage and 6 percentage respectively as against the average of 12-15 percentage of other developed and developing countries like US, China etc. Therefore, we need to look at the governance policies from the perspective of women's sustained progress in India.

Vasavada T. suggests a multidimensional process for eliminating the biased masculine hegemony in work and leadership styles and challenges in acceptance of feminine work-culture or leadership. Explaining the practices in the West, in the journal article Deconstructing Gender by Joan C. Williams (1989), it has been correctly pointed out that the Western wage labour system is a system of power relations with the allocation of different roles to men and women and ideal labour has been defined as no family and child-care responsibilities. This also extends to the wage; men earn as ideal labour and their right to earn more in comparison to female counter parts. This has resulted to economic and social vulnerability of women and when it comes to their progress and leadership, women have to sacrifice and face lots of challenges for accepting and performing their roles of successful workers and leaders while accommodating their family and child-care responsibilities.

Women of the digital age may enjoy equal opportunity for work, pay, promotion, progression, leadership roles without sacrificing the family responsibilities and child-care responsibilities. On the contrary, digitally empowered women may prove that their choices have not resulted to women's economic marginalization.

There is not much change in the traditional gender system as women still have enhanced and imposed family responsibility as compared to man. This situation may not change unless we redesign our wage and labour policies keeping parenting activities into consideration. This is a transition phase of women's journey towards progress or success in India. Even in the present time, women have to make sacrifices so that men become ideal worker although both of them are working, the strongly and deeply rooted social and cultural up-bringing does not allow someone to even think of reverse situation where man supports a woman to become ideal worker.

In modern time, gender neutrality will be successful only when men and women both share the family responsibilities. This digital age may prove to be a boon in supporting women in their path of progress by including flexitime and promoting such work-policies

which incentivizes sharing of family responsibilities between both the genders. Fundamental societal change is necessary for Indian women's progress in today's competitive world.

Methods

This research paper aims to analyse the impact of gender-neutral policy in men and women with respect to pay, promotion and opportunity of leadership which has contributed and will continue to affect Indian women's progress. 100 men and 100 women have been taken for this survey. Opinions over merit and historic injustice to women have been given due importance. Garrett Ranking method has been used for this analysis. Data has been collected from the employees of the organisations which have adopted gender-neutral policy, gender-specific policy and hybrid policy. Sample comprises of employees of all cadres from small, medium and large-scale organisations, companies, educational institutes, sports, defence, administrative fields. The results of this analysis will pave the way for progress of women in future by revising the existing norms of gender neutrality, by using hybrid policy and still advocating gender equity.

Hypothesis

1. Gender-neutral policy are perceived as the most preferred policy for their progress by both men and women.
2. Elements of Gender-neutral policy for men and women mean the same with the same weightage.
3. Gender-neutral policy are considered as fairer than gender-specific policy by the employees for progress.

Data Analysis and Discussions

Garrett Ranking Results for 100 Men and 100 Women

1. Men's Rankings (Based on Mean Garrett Scores)

Policy Approach	Mean Garrett Score	Rank
Gender-Neutral Policy	56.96	1st
Equal Opportunity for Leadership	56.48	2nd
Equal Opportunity for Promotion	54.44	3rd
Equal Pay	53.12	4th
Hybrid Policy	50.72	5th
Gender-Specific Policy	49.76	6th

2. Women's Rankings (Based on Mean Garrett Scores)

Policy Approach	Mean Garrett Score	Rank
Equal Pay	54.44	1st
Hybrid Policy	53.6	2nd
Gender-Specific Policy	52.88	3rd
Gender-Neutral Policy	52.76	4th

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Policy Approach	Mean Garrett Score	Rank
Equal Opportunity for Leadership	50.84	5th
Equal Opportunity for Promotion	49.76	6th

The above analysis highlights that men and women have different perspectives for gender neutral policy and opportunity to lead. Men have prioritized the gender-neutral policy and have given this first rank. They focus more on getting equal opportunity for leadership, equal opportunity for promotion. They want fair and equal wages and equal terms and condition for everyone. Hybrid policy and gender-specific policy has not been preferred by men.

As per the above given ranking, women have given first preference to equal pay and have suggested hybrid policy. They support gender-specific policy. Some women have supported gender neutral policy. Women also consider equal opportunity of leadership and promotion as important factor for their career growth and progression.

Ethical dilemma involved in supporting gender-neutral policy and supporting women's leadership are whether being fair and providing equal opportunity mean treating everyone for everything equal without giving much attention and additional support to disadvantaged and vulnerable groups to bring them into the main stream. Gender specific policy may further the gap and there are chances of reverse situation but this is quite true that gender neutral behaviour alone is not sufficient in the present scenario. Overcoming the barrier of historical disadvantage, women with merit and desired qualifications must be given equal opportunity free from any biasedness. Gender-specific programme are perceived as unfair by the counterparts. Organizations must consider and include people with diversified portfolio not merely on the grounds of gender. A hybrid approach with specific attention on some issues like parental leave, flexi-time may be given to bring forward the talented and unbiased women workers and leaders. Gender-neutral recruitment, promotion and leadership opportunities are equally important in the modern times. Judicious blend of both gender-neutral and gender-specific policies play a significant role in the progress of Indian women and making and nurturing of good women leaders.

Conclusion

Indian women are making progress in all the spheres of life with the institutional supportive environment focussing on gender equity. Women's increasing participation has become crucial for good governance nowadays resulting in the progress of nation. Gender neutrality is the most important factor for good governance. Both as a leader and team member on board, women are facing visible and invisible challenges and need a supportive environment to address the issue of gender neutrality. Gender neutral policies must be revisited and redesigned to bring about the diversity and reap the strategic advantage which will result in increase in profitability and greater transparency in the organisation thereby resulting in the Indian women's progress.

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