


Chapter 35

Interim Management Strategy as a Way of Empowering Women Leadership

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ABSTRACT

Although major steps have been taken to increase inclusive representation of women in the workforce, there is a significant gender gap in achieving leadership roles in both developed and developing regions. In particular, many women around the world face serious challenges that prevent them from moving to leadership positions. Women's empowerment approaches are needed in order to have equal access to resources, to participate in decision-making processes, and to support career advancement. Within this context, interim management strategies can be considered as one of the empowering opportunities for women leadership. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the role of interim management on women leaders' empowerment. This is the first attempt that evaluates the notion of interim management as part of empowerment of women's leadership. It is expected to add value to literature on women in leadership positions and corporate decision-making.

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, studies on the exclusion of women from key decision-making positions have been the central points of discussion on gender issues (Eboiyehi, Fayomi, & Eboiyehi, 2016; Profeta, 2017). Currently, the global employment market continues characterized by inequality between male and female leadership roles (Fritz & Knippenberg, 2017). Despite the increase in female employees in the mid-management positions, male dominance continues mostly in the top managerial positions (Schwanke, 2013). Besides, it is commonly acknowledged that women are either severely underrepresented in senior management in normal circumstances or over-represented in risky management positions, such as organizational crises

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or downturn (Macarie & Moldovan, 2012). The insufficient presence of qualified women in leading roles has raised social and cultural problems and created remarkably a gender gap in many areas of the workplace (Grove & Montgomery, 1999). Moreover, one of the most significant current discussions in sustainable development for many countries around the world is “to promote gender equality and empower women” (UNOV/UNODC, 2018). These debates have raised some questions regarding which strategies can empower women, reduce the gender gap and promote gender equality. Different management strategies can be pursued in order to support sustainable development goals regarding gender equality, in this context by reducing the adverse effects of gender inequality at the top management levels. For instance, approaches designed on the basis of inspiring women leaders and changing beliefs about them may play a critical role in reducing gender gaps in leadership positions (Brown, Mansour, & O’Connell, 2018).

On the other hand, it is necessary to clarify exactly current leadership trends before presenting a strategy proposal for female leaders’ empowerment. Restructuring companies in a fast-changing business environment has led to the need for a more proactive, flexible and adaptable type of leadership that involves radical change rather than old-fashioned working methods (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010). As a result of which, interim management strategy has emerged as an alternative to permanent management strategy (Inkson, Heising, & Rousseau, 2001). Interim management is a new employment type in which an organization assigns an expert for a temporary duration to overcome a specific managerial, economical or technical difficulty (Eurofound, 2018). Nowadays, a growing number of women choose to pursue careers in interim management that helps women break the glass ceiling. The general reasons why women leaders prefer interim careers are the desire for more independence and more flexibility, the possibility of earning more through portfolio careers, a lack of concern about promotion and so on (Lloyd, 2014).

However, there is a lack of research on such flexible working arrangements of women in senior positions. Therefore, it is important to investigate how the interim career opportunities empower women and affect their representation in senior management of organizations. The aim of this chapter is to point out the concept of interim leadership strategy as a women empowerment tool. In this context, it first lays out the prior studies on women’s leadership and women empowerment. It then discusses a strategy called interim management which empowers women leaders by involving more women in senior positions. The author concludes the chapter by presenting limitations and possible directions for future studies based on the strategies of women empowerment.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND BACKGROUND

Women in Leadership

To date, numerous global researches have been conducted on gender differences in leadership (Clisbee, 2005; Gorska, 2016; Moran, 1992). The general findings demonstrate that there is a lack of gender parity in leadership and women are significantly underrepresented in top positions. In particular, it also highlights that the number of women leaders is insufficient in the corporate world. This raises the question of what are the underlying reasons for the gender gap in leadership.

Globally, women in leadership still confront various barriers to professional advancement. Various authors have used different terms for these career barriers. The term glass ceiling first used by Bryant (1984) is widely used to describe an invisible but strong barrier in their efforts to reach the upper echelons (Valian, 1999). Afterward, a new metaphor called labyrinth developed by Eagly and Carli (2007), explains

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