

Presence of Women as administrative leaders in Higher Education Institutions as an indicator of empowerment of women

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Abstract

Higher education is a unique space in the sense that the women functioning in Higher education institutions belong to the highly educated class of people, who are also economically empowered. They also providing a model for empowerment of women through education and economic emancipation. This environment still holds a lot of challenges for women in managerial positions which are quasi administrative in nature. These positions include department heads, deans, committee chairpersons, administrative officers and vice chancellors. When we place these women in higher education workspaces, some of the fundamental issues like education and economic empowerment are resolved but new and unique challenges emerge alongside those that working women face in general.

Keywords: Women administrators, higher education, gender, leadership, empowerment

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Introduction

The present paper looks to explore the various aspects and challenges facing women managers in higher education. The paper delves into the challenges that women have faced and the kind of leadership qualities required to overcome these challenges in their workspace. Higher education is a unique space in the sense that the women functioning in Higher education institutions belong to the highly educated class of people who are also economically empowered. They providing a model for empowerment of women through education and economic empowerment. This environment still holds a lot of challenges for women in managerial positions which are quasi administrative in nature. These include department heads, deans, committee chairpersons, administrative officers and vice chancellors. The paper will first explore various theories of leadership and assess how far they are suitable to assess requirement of higher education environment and then see how these qualities have helped women in creating a space for themselves so far. It will also assess the short falls and further requirements in the system.

When we talk about the empowerment of women, we are not talking of a simple idea but an issue with multiple facets and challenges where the scope for improvement is immense but the complexities inherent in the situation create hurdles and impediments that make achieving the desired success difficult goal to achieve. When we place these women in higher education workspaces, some of the fundamental issues like education and economic empowerment are resolved but new and unique challenges emerge alongside those that working women face in general.

Empowerment and leadership models

Generally, when we talk of leadership, we are looking at the capacity of a person to take up a responsibility and to give direction to a team. The inherent characteristics that a leader should possess have been subject of much research and enquiry. Some of the basic theories that we use in order to study leadership are the trait theory, the behaviour studies, the contingency theory and the power theory along with cultural and symbolic theories. Let us understand the approach of each of these theories to leadership before we begin our investigation of the place of women in the context of leadership positions

The trait theory approaches leadership by looking at the physical features, the abilities, the personality and interpersonal abilities of the individual. The theory that derived out of the idea of “great man” proposed by Thomas Carlyle in the book *On Heroes, Hero worship and Heroic History* (1941). The idea strongly held belief for almost a century but by the middle of the 20th Century, questions were raised about the viability of the approach as it emerged that people effective in one situation might not be effective in others (Stogdill, 1948). This also led to behavioral and situational approaches to assess leadership. By the end of the first decade of the present century, it saw a revival when investigations revealed that people with leadership traits could be leaders in different situations (Hoffman, Woehr, Maldagen-Youngjohn, & Lyons, 2011)

The behavioral studies look at the ability of the individual to establish relationships and to interact with the team. We can see here the physical features or the personal charisma are not as important as the ability of a person to be able to establish interpersonal relationships.

In the contingency approach the leadership is determined by the situation and the demands of the task. So here the kind of specialization or skill a person has to finish a task makes the person the leader of the team.

The power theory places the ability of the person to be able to exercise power and motivate the team as the primary function and characteristic of the leader. Here the ability of the individual to exercise power determines the position of the leader vis-a-vis the team and puts the leader at the top of the team.

Cultural and symbolic theories look at the ability of a person to reshape and transform the structure. It involves the ability of the leader to moderate and transform the culture within the system to suit the demands from the system.

Most scholars agree that trait theory is most useful in understanding leadership within Institutions of Higher Education especially with reference to women. The qualities in a leader include intelligence, self-confidence, determination, integrity and sociability, but in view of the unique nature of a higher education institution, a quality that we must look for is emotional intelligence. As a leadership trait it was accepted later (Caruso & Wolfe, 2004). It has, on the one hand personal competence, on the other it also requires social competence with abilities like empathy, communication and conflict resolution. This arises out of the difference in the perceived requirements of leadership for women and men.

Women in Higher Education

A UNESCO study (1993) found a contradiction between perceptions of male and female managers. For instance, male managers were expected to be firm and authoritative, whilst women managers were expected to show these characteristics as well as more traditionally feminine qualities such as nurturing and empathy. The study also argued that women tended to be more idealistic in their leadership aspirations, and less interested in power and status than their male counterparts.

In a fundamentally patriarchal society like India, this becomes even more manifest where the women are the acknowledged as primary care-givers. The role of the caregiver is extended into the workspace. The situation could be different in societies where the role of care-giver is increasingly shared by the male and female in the family,

thereby releasing women from the straitjacket and stereotype. Ironically, even in the more open and intellectually stimulated environment of higher education the situation does not change a lot in India.

According to the AISHE report 2019-20, there are 1043 Universities, 42343 Colleges and 11779 Stand Alone Institutions listed on AISHE web portal and out of them 1019 Universities, 39955 Colleges and 9599 Stand-alone Institutions have responded during the survey. There are 17 universities exclusively for women. On the whole, the total enrolment in higher education estimated to be 38.5 million, there are 19.6 million boys and 18.9 million females. Female constitute 49% of the total enrolment. This projects a better presence of women learners in higher education. Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in Higher education in India is 27.1, which is calculated for 18-23 years of age group. GER for male population is 26.9 and for female it is 27.23.

There has been a steady upsurge in the presence of women in higher education – the number of students as well as the teachers. The last decade has seen a steady rise in women's enrolment in higher education. It was less than 10% of the total enrolment on the eve of Independence and has risen to 48.6% in 2018-19. But the growth is slower in technical education. The enrolment of females was lower in the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and National Institutes of Technology (NITs) in comparison to the overall enrolment of women. The share of male students enrolled in engineering and technology is 71.1% compared to female enrolment, which is just 28.9%.

We do find a lot of women now entering into teaching positions at the entry level. The picture changes when we move into the figures related to teachers in these institutions. Of the total 15,03,156 teachers, there are 8,64,337 male teachers while the number of female teachers is 6,38,819. The gap widens in the middle positions where out of the total 160137 readers and associate professors, there are 1,00,652 male teachers and just 59,485 female teachers. It gets even more grim at the level of Professors where the total figure of 1,39,797 is made up of 1,01,319 male members and 38,478 female members. This is the gap in the numbers of male and female in middle management where positions like heads and committee chairpersons come in. It gets sparser in the positions of deans and even fewer in highest management like vice chancellors, and directors. Tushar Kanti Ghara says that the enrollment in higher education is almost equal but when we look at the minute details, we find the skews. In central universities where the number of seats has shown little variation, at the undergraduate levels, the past 5 years there has been a slight improvement in the enrollment ratio of male to female so that while there were 2,96,437 male and 2,65,663 female in 2015-16, the figures in 2019-20 stood at 2,77,315 males to 2,62,995 females. But when we look at the same time period in institutes of national importance, the figures tell a different story. There was total increase of 46,065 seats from 2015-16 to 2019-20 for which the number of enrollments for male constituted 30,574 while for female it was 15,491. These institutes are institutes of technical education and research mostly with very good prospects of employability. The fact that women were not enrolled in equal ratio means that while they might be making up in the traditional courses giving general degrees, but when it comes to technical education and job worthiness, the gap is probably widening. As the levels rise in higher education, the numbers get more and more revealing of the gender divide. With hardly an exception the global picture is one of men outnumbering women at about five to one at middle management level and at about twenty or more to one at the level of highest positions. According to the World University Rankings by The Times just 39 of the top 200 ranking universities have a female head and are all in the developed countries.

In a research, commissioned by British Council in Pakistan, Morley and Crossouard found that among the main issues regarding the presence of women as administrators in Higher education institutions, the first and foremost is the fact that in records of policy on Higher education, focus is only on projecting and analyzing figures of enrollment of girls as students. There is little to no data on the presence and participation of women in administrative levels of the institution. This "absence of gender dis-aggregated statistics" hampers policy making at the level of implementation as well as monitoring post implementation. The case in point is provided by the fact that though government proposed setting up women's universities, among the three big states of northern India, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh have just two women's universities even though it has been proved (Morley & Crossouard, 2015) that women only learning spaces and women only leadership development courses are very effective in enablers for participation of women in administrative roles in India.

Challenges of leadership: professional, sexual and personal

At the senior management level women deans and professors are a minority group and women vice-chancellors and presidents are still a rarity. Therefore, women's invisibility at top levels in the system also became a focus of study and research. Talking about the U.G.C programme for empowerment of women in higher education Karuna Chanana (2020) says “there are sufficient numbers of qualified women to take up leadership in higher educational institutions, provided they could be propelled and empowered to come out of their comfort zones and work toward a definite goal with a clear vision. Women have to see the structural and organisational barriers that prevent them from reclaiming their place, and to take up positions of administrative and managerial leadership. They have to be provided the capacity to perceive it, and to overcome it in the institutions in which they are located.” This requires qualities of leadership at the inter-personal level along with a firmness and ability to take initiative in handling responsibilities. It also involves setting a role model which will inspire women down the line to push harder and find a place in the decision-making processes. The teachers in their role as managers do not just handle power to take decisions regarding policy making and implementation, but also help create an atmosphere where more women will feel comfortable working. They can also provide counseling to the junior faculty members to overcome the hurdles that moving into managerial positions poses. Bamji reports in an INSA report on challenges faced by women in taking up administrative challenges that getting the first placement or employment was not difficult. It was when they entered into the second stage and time came to move up the ladder that they faced “gender insensitive organizational practices and work-place discrimination” (Bamji, 2005) which led them to giving up on career opportunities and compromise on professional growth. It is in these situations that a strong leadership becomes crucial which can inspire, support and help them deal not just with nepotism and bias but also social prejudices. The Capacity building workshops were a successful in creating awareness about the importance of hand holding if the campus of higher education institutions is to find gender parity.

This building of capacity involves providing support in terms of policy making, building support in terms of development of infrastructure and finally creating safeguards to create a secure work environment for women to work in. Even with many of these measures in place there is still a lag in the number of women in positions of higher management when we take a closer look at the challenges women face at various levels and means to alleviate these challenges. The challenge for women is three-fold when they have to move up the ladder in Higher education institutions- professional, sexual and personal.

At the professional level, in order to meet the challenges and increase their visibility at the middle and higher levels, the first requirement is to make themselves available to opportunities when they arise and handholding so that chances of visibility improve. As a corollary, women also need to step up their efforts to build networks which promote women in positions of middle and higher managerial positions. Those in higher positions need to identify and encourage more and more women to take up responsibilities so that the glass ceiling is finally broken. The hypothesis that the norm is that the decision-making hierarchy will be male dominated needs to be questioned – and that can only happen when decisions are seen as being taken by women. Programs like workshops on Capacity Building of Women Managers in Higher Education (2007-2012) and forum like Women’s Advisory Boards set in the process of empowerment through better representation and participation of women in managerial positions.

Under the capacity building program there were two levels of workshops which formed the core. The first-level workshops were Sensitization, Awareness and Motivation, or SAM workshops. In SAM workshops the focus was on understanding the self in a social context; to motivate the women and to reorient their thinking; and to help them understand the systemic barriers faced by them. The second level were Training of Trainers workshops, or ToTs. Selected participants from SAM workshops were invited to ToTs. Training of Trainers give them the skills to become SAM trainers. This entire process at the primary level sought to help create awareness regarding the systemic barriers to the progress of women in academic structures and at the second level aimed to help initiate

discussions and attempts to overcome these systemic barriers. Programs such as these, catalyze the process of greater inclusivity and participation of women as administrators.

The utility of such training programmes as catalysts for greater participation of women in administration policy making and leadership in higher education institutions is well established (Chanana 2020, Morley & Crossouard 2017, Bamji 2005). That fact that the programme had a far-reaching impact (Chanana, 2020) also reiterates the importance of running such programmes. There is also a need of establishing more women's only institutions so that a third aspect of the situation is the harassment that is gender oriented and turns sexual in nature when the most common condition of quid pro quo is seen operating. The culture of misogyny prevailing in a predominantly male environment sometimes results in incidents of sexual harassment allegedly faced by some of the female faculty and research scholars and other gender-related issues. Such behavior is not always open but even actions like denial of work creating a hostile environment through verbal abuse, display of graffiti or physical obscenity can have serious consequences. They reduce performance, humiliate, disrupt the personal relationships and even compel the woman to quit workplace. Supreme Court laid down the Vishaka guidelines in 1997 in *Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan* and others are mandatory and put emphasis on prevention through awareness and efficient complaint mechanism. The guidelines entail the formation of a Complaints Committee Against Sexual Harassment (CCASH) in every organization which has women workers in any capacity. For the purpose of making an inquiry the Complaint Committee shall have the same powers as are vested in a civil court under the Code of Civil Procedure 1908 when trying a suit in respect of "Summoning and enforcing the attendance of any person and examining him on oath, Requiring the discovery and production of documents, and any other matter which may be prescribed" (Section 11(3)) most importantly its recommendations can only be challenged in the High Court. This was followed by The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013 which introduced S.354A, dealing with sexual harassment in IPC and in 2013 passed the Sexual harassment (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act. The committee has to have women in senior faculty position as chairperson and also representation by weaker sections of society along with a legal expert. This not only provides forum for grievance redressal but also raises the awareness among the male counterparts regarding the behavior and ethics expected of them regarding their female colleagues.

The legal measures have, thus, helped create a framework to resort to in case of an attempt at sexual harassment. This does create a sense of security for women in their workspaces. But there has to be a lot of effort put in to change the acceptance of the presence of women in the male dominated spaces at the highest decision-making levels and improve acceptance in these spaces. A lot is still required to be done to create equal opportunities for women at workplace and provide them a safe and conducive environment where they may function to potential but the process has begun. Most of the challenges to the presence of women in the decision-making levels of higher education arise out of the balance that women find themselves making between their work life and personal responsibilities. Their role as the care giver in their family begins to get increasingly more demanding as they are moving up the ladder in their profession. Most of the time it is the women who take the back seat in the drive for career goals when a decision has to be made in the matter in a family set up.

In their personal life, by the time they reach the age they can move into middle levels of management, they are also handling crucial responsibilities at home. The children are usually moving into preparation for careers and the elders have aged and need care (Mayya 2021). The responsibilities in both cases are handled more by the women who are also expected to give up on important opportunities of networking through attending seminars and conferences and responsibilities that need longer hours at work place in the professional lives. The consequences of this are reflected in the professional life since the lack of networking and lobbying results in having to give up on opportunities even though they might fulfill the qualifications and be competent to handle the responsibilities.

To challenge the challenges

The solution is not simple. It demands that if women have to move up the ladder, they have to come out of their comfort zones and make efforts to create or, if necessary, demand their system to help and appreciate their efforts to move up into more responsible positions. This involves a support from the family and in most cases the spouse.

This is difficult, as stated earlier, since to share the responsibilities of the caregiver is not just a role change but a drastic shift in perception and mind set. The role shift also involves a social acceptance which is not easy to come by. The position of the male members is still considered to be higher and responsibility of household are not supposed to be handled by them (Gupta & Sharma 2005). The stereotyping has to be broken and a mindset has to develop that the care giving is not the natural womanly instinct but an attribute, like any other, that can be nurtured. This involves that there will be times when the male members might have to either not work with the assured presence of the women back home to take care of things or they might have to forego opportunities and take up the responsibilities in the household. It also implies that the career and growth of the woman in the house is considered as a matter of pride and importance as that of the men. The question this raises is whether there is such a mind-set evolving? And the answer, looking at the way the situation has evolved, is probably not in a very remarkable manner. The work space and home space are not segregated and if change will come in one, it will be reflected in the other.

Mckinsey's *Women Matter* report (Desvaux, Devillard, Alix de Zelicourt, 2017) talks of the attributes of an inclusive organization includes unorthodox, polymorphic and empowered as the top three. Unorthodox institutions are willing to create a culture through framing rules and policies suited not just to the demands of the dominant group but for all the members of the community making up the institution. Polymorphic systems use diverse styles of leadership and not stereotype the demands for a person in a position of leadership. From this emerges the third attribute of the empowered where instead of command and control, the members are empowered to shape the future and the organization gets a non-hierarchical character. If we are to create a space where women can enter and function with freedom. When we put the same unorthodox flexible and polymorphic spaces in a home, it helps creates an atmosphere where women can think of trying to fulfill their potential as professionals as well as women.

We need to build upon the advantages that the greater presence of female students at the undergraduate levels brings. Women also not only need to enter the as teachers at the first level as Assistant Professors but also move into actual participation in the life of the institution at the highest levels of decision-making. This is not just a challenge for the women in the country but across the world.

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