Negotiating The Cultural Barriers: A Study Of Organizational Commitment Of Pakhtun Female Employees In Pakistani Banking Sector

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Abstract

This exploratory study has been carried out in different branches of a larger bank within two cities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province viz Peshawar and Dera Ismail Khan. The culture of province is dominantly based on 'Pakhtunwali' that refers to the 'unwritten code of life that governs and negotiates the everyday life of Pakhtuns. Pakhtunwali imposes certain cultural barriers on female employment. Among others, 'Namos' (protection of honor) is a foremost tenant of Pakhtunwali, which does not allow females to participate in public life. However, a recent trend reveals that more females, especially young ones, are getting engaged in paid work. These female employees demonstrate their organizational commitment through negotiating the cultural barriers at workplace. Grounded Theory techniques have been used to collect and analyze field data. This study makes important contributions in terms of understanding the work life of Pakhtuns female employees in a novel context. It will also contribute in policy formulation towards gender equity and equality in the context of Pakhtun region.

Keywords: Gender, Pakhtunwali, Organizational Commitment, Cultural Barriers.

تلخیص

یہ تحقیقاتی مطالعہ خیبر پختونخواہ کے دو شہروں پشاور اور ڈیرہ اسماعیل خان میں کیا گیا ہے۔ صوبے کی ثقافت پختونولی پر مبنی ہے جو پختونوں کی روز مرہ زندگی کے معاملات کی رہنمائی کرتا ہے۔ پختونولی میں بعض ثقافتی رکاوٹیں خواتین کی ملازمتوں پر عائد کی گئی ہیں۔ ناموس کی حفاظت پختونالی کا ایک اہم اصول ہے جس میں خواتین کو گھر کے باہر کے معاملات میں حصہ لینے کی اجازت نہیں ہے تاہم ایک حالیہ رجحان سے پتہ چلتا ہے کہ زیادہ خواتین خاص طور پر نوجوان خواتین ملازمتیں کر رہی ہیں۔ یہ خواتین ملازم اپنے تنظیمی عزم کو ظاہر کرتی ہیں کہ کام کی جگہ پر ثقافتی رکاوٹوں کو کس طرح بات چیت کے ذریعے عبور کرتی ہیں۔ گراؤنڈیڈ تھیوری کی تکنیک کو فیلڈ ڈیٹا جمع کرنے اور تجزیہ کرنے کے لئے استعمال کیا گیا ہے۔ یہ مطالعہ پختون خواتین ملازمین کی کام کی جگہ پر زندگی کو

سمجھنے کے لئے بہت اہم ہے کیوں کہ یہ ان مسائل کو اُجاگر کرتا ہے۔ اُمید ہے کہ یہ مطالعہ پختونخواہ میں صنفی مساوات قائم کرنے
کے لئے اہم ہو گا۔

کلیدی الفاظ: صنف، پختون ولی، تنظیمی عزم، ثقافتی رکاوٹیں

Introduction

For the last three decades, organizational commitment has remained one of the main research interests in the field of organizational studies (Fisher, Boyle &Fulo., 2010). It has been studied both as an attitudinal and behavioral phenomenon. The attitudinal aspect is described in terms of identification with and internalization of organizational goals and values, while the behavioral aspect tends to focus on the individual's behavior as central to organizational commitment. Allen and Meyer's (1990) Three Component Model (TCM) is significant to understand concept of organizational commitment in terms of affective, normative, and continuance commitment. Affective commitment is a psychological bond between the individual and organization and is complete alignment between personal goals and organizational goals. Normative commitment is a sense of obligation to remain as a member of an organization. Continuance commitment is the individual's desire to continue employment due to a perceived cost of leaving the organization

Historically, two competing paradigms i.e. job model and gender model (Feldberg and Glenn, 1979) have been used to explain organizational commitment among male and female employees. The job model states gender differences are not relevant to organizational commitment, while gender model believes gender differences are pertinent to understand nature oforganizational commitment of the two. It is based on the assumption that females prefer family roles over their work roles, while for males work roles are paramount (Fisher *et al.*, 2010; Aven, Parker & McEvoy., 1993). A number of studies in the Western context have shown that males and females significantly differ in their perceptions and expectation of respective workplace roles (Branscome, 1998). Because of gender role ideology, female employees are perceived as being less associated with their work roles even when they are at work. The added responsibility of domestic chores puts female employees at a disadvantage where they are alleged to be less committed employees (Peng *et al.*, 2009).

Organizational commitment is a psychological contract between an individual employee and organization (Scandura and Lankau, 1997). There has been evidence of gender differences in regard to psychological contracts (ibid). Research on gender difference in organizational commitment is not conclusive (Mathieu and Zajac, 1990). There are some

studies which suggest that compared to males, female employees are more committed (Gray, 1989; Angle and Perry, 1981), while others suggest that male employees are more committed (Aranya et al., 1986). Still there are some studies which argue that there are no gender differences with respect to organizational commitment (Bruning and Snyder, 1983). It can be claimed that until today, researchers have not succeeded in establishing the specific relationship between gender and organizational commitment (Fisher *et al.*, 2010).

Literature Review

Traditional approaches to organizational commitment have discounted the fact that different gendered experiences of employees can result in different levels and nature of organizational commitment among them (Fisher *et al.*, 2010). Male and female employees have a different nature of organizational commitment because of different workplace experiences (Singh and Vinnicombe, 2000). Consequently, it would be misleading to conceptualize the gendered nature of organizational commitment without understanding the workplace experiences of female employees. However, in many of the previous studies on the subject life experiences of the individuals have been ignored. According to Marton & Svensson (1979), life experiences are important avenues for exploring meaning, sense making and social construction of reality. From this perspective "the experiences of individuals, and contexts in which they occur, should be the main source of data" (Fisher *et al.*, 2010:283).

Though subject of organizational commitment has been widely researched, however the question of how do the gendered lived experiences inform female employees' organizational commitment, has not been addressed sufficiently (Fisher *et al.*, 2010). Today, females constitute a significant portion of the work force across the world. This has significantly diverted the attention of organizational scholars (e.g. Aydin, Sarier & Uysal, 2011; Seong, Hong & Park, 2011; Fisher *et al.*, 2010) to appreciate gender as a major facet of organizational commitment research.

Historically, there are few studies which focus specifically on organizational commitment of female employees. Many of these studies have been carried out in the USA or in Western context. In other parts of the world in general, and in South East Asia in particular, the subject of 'gendered nature of organizational commitment' remained as a novel concept to be explored. To the best of our knowledge there is hardly any prior investigation in Pakistan that investigates the gender aspect of organizational commitment in a way that this study does. Hence, this study looks at organizational commitment in quite a different context and under quite different circumstances.

Personal Motivation for Study

After working for the last fifteen years in a public sector university, authors are well informed about the difficulties being faced by female employees and female students in a male dominated environment. Authors have witnessed female employees [students] who quitted their jobs [education] because of different cultural barriers. This study is inspired by the researchers' own workplace observations. Researchers have observed that female colleagues [students] face issues because of the gendered nature of workplace. Cultural beliefs and norms are much dominant at workplace. There is very much less acceptance of female employment. The intention behind all this is to make some contribution[s] for easing the work life of female employees in Pakistan. This study will help in devising policies to promote gender equity and equality at workplaces in Pakhtun region.

The Context of Study: Pakhtunwali Culture

This study has been carried out in different branches of a larger bank in Pakistan. These branches were located in two cities (Peshawar and Dera Ismail Khan) of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. As stated earlier that this study is aimed at exploring the lived experiences of Pakhtun female employees at workplace to understand the nature of their organizational commitment. These lived experiences are context specific so to gain better understanding of these lived experiences it is very much necessary to understand the context of this study. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has culture of Pakhtunwali which describes the ways of life for Pakhtuns. The two cities mentioned earlier are also dominated by this culture which encompass the social life. Muhammad (2011: 105, 110) defined Pakhtunwali as "the code of life as understood, interpreted and practiced by Pakhtuns. Johnson and Mason (2008: 59) describe that

> "Pakhtunwali is the keystone of Pakhtuns' identity and social structure, and it shapes all forms of behaviours from the cradle to the grave ... A Pakhtun must adhere to this code to maintain his honour and retain his identity".

Muhammad (2011) mentioned that among other nine main tenets of Pakhtunwali, nang or namus is of much interest. Nang is "representing a man's obligation to protect the inviolability of his person, his property, and his women" (Johnson and Mason, 2008: 62). Maintaining and protecting namus is considered as social, moral, and religious obligation among Pakhtuns (Muhammad, 2011).

Cultural patriarchy is much more visible in Pakhtun culture. All the social, economic, legal and religious powers lie in the hands of men. Men decide women's fate (Kakar, 2006). In Pakhtun culture, women are symbol/careers of family honor. Any act of women contradictory to Pakhtun norms is not allowed. The tradition of pardah (veiling) restrict women within the four walls and does not allow for employment (Adrees, 2005).

Apparently, the life of Pakhtun females living in urban areas seems to be much different from those of living in rural areas. However, when it comes to social integration of females with males at workplaces then urban female employees do not enjoy much liberty. Conclusively, Pakhtun females face multitude cultural barriers to join out of home employment and they need to overcome these barriers to play their due part in socio-economic development of the region.

Though there is provision of equal rights for all citizen of Pakistan irrespective of gender, race, class etc. under the article 25 of 1973 constitution. However, the norms and informal rules of society mostly deny these rights females. The case of Pakhtun females in this regard is much severe. Pakhtun females are accommodated within the social structure at a place where they do not deviate the standards of Pakhtunwali.

Methodology

This study has used grounded theory techniques as methods for data collection and analysis. The field data was collected through unstructured interviews from the female Management Trainee Officers (MTOs), and other relevant employees. The researcher sought official permission from the bank for conducting the field work. In the start, researcher used convenience sampling. Later on, snow ball sampling was followed. Overall, twenty respondents were interviewed (15 females & 5 male). All the interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. A prior consent of respondents was obtained. Other ethical issues (informed consent & participant information sheet, cultural concerns) were also taken care off. For example, interview quotes are indexed using fictitious names. The data collection was guided by the principle of 'theoretical saturation' (Corbin & Strauus, 1990). Theoretical saturation is the phase of qualitative data analysis in which the researcher has continued sampling and analysing data until no new data appear and all concepts in the theory are well-developed.

Data analysis was done using constant comparison method (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Charmaz, 2006; Glasser& Strauss, 1967). Constant comparison method is widely used technique of qualitative data analysis. Glasser and Strauss (1967) describe it as a four stage process. These four steps are looking/comparing for similar incidents in each interview, integrating these into similar categories, delimiting these categories into a theory and then writing a theory. This complex method can be simplified in terms of developing open codes, thematic codes, thematic categories and writing a theory. Under this method, we look for similar/different incidents simultaneously across all the interviews and want to know how the different individuals have describe the similar incident[s]. This helps us to develop and merge similar themes in terms of thematic codes. By doing further comparison among thematic codes we are able to develop thematic categories, which build our theory to understanding a specific social phenomenon.

In case of this study, at first, all the data were coded through line by line and paragraph coding to develop the initial open codes, using both In-Vivo and descriptive codes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Charmaz, 2006). In the second stage, focused coding (Saldana, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994) was used to develop thematic codes. In third and last stage, theoretical coding (Saldana, 2009) was used to systematically link initially developed codes to build the core category of 'resistance'. The next section presents the findings of this study.

Findings of Study: Resistance

For the purpose of this study, resistance refers to both internal and external resistance which hinders female MTOs in their promotion to higher organizational position.

Internal Resistance for Female MTOs

It is important to reveal the underlying reason of internal 'resistance'. This bank, since 2006, has initiated Females Empowerment Program and started to hireyoung females as MTOs. Male employees do not favor this and resist female MTOs.There are various reasons of this resistance. Following, we describe that why and how there is resistance to female MTOs.

Why and how Resistance to Female MTOs

Internal resistance happens in different forms. For example, it was known that male employees do not transfer/share knowledge to/with female MTOs. One female MTO stated that:

> If I have some problem I discuss with my [female] colleagues. If there are males [employees] we cannot discuss because if you ask them, they will say "you do not know? If we ask them they pretend to be busy, in fact they do not want us to be at par with them. (Tania)

The statement suggests the signifying impact of societal gendered beliefs at workplace. It was also known that there was no appreciation for female MTOs and there were some incidents of 'shouting' on them. Female MTOs have perceptions that [male] employees resist them not only in their daily work but also hurdles their career growth. Findings revealed that certain organizational and personal factors also results into internal resistance. These include financial benefits, promotion, fear of losing jobs, favors to female MTOs, and age difference between male employees and female MTOs. For example, one male employee narrated:

> In this bank … for example, if a person (male employees)fulfills criteria but does not get an opportunity, while the others (female MTOs) having the same education but no experience are promoted, and gets 30% more salary ... I think we have no future in this bank (Nusrat).

It shows that bank's policies are perceived as discriminatory bymale employees. There is widespread fear among male employees that sooner they are going to lose job because now bank is hiring more MTOs. Male employees were of the opinion that top management gives more favors to female MTOs. All this causes internal resistance for female MTOs.

External Resistance to Female MTOs: Why and how?

The findings inform that local gendered practices also cause resistance to female MTOs. Male employees have strong belief in social division between males and females and have faith in 'male as the breadwinner and female as homemaker'. The following quote from a male employee's interview transcript revealed this;

> You know that we are not this much liberal that we allow our females to work with males. Our religion forbids female employment. Islam has asked females to remain inside the four walls [of home]. Females should be within the home and to worry about domestic chores, not earning. This is the males' duty to earn and feed them. This is what our religion says (Shahzada)

This statement is reflexive of local gendered practices and religious orientation in regard to female employment. Female employment is considered as losing respect and status in society. Out of home jobs not only bear consequences for the family but also have implications for females as well in terms of their marriage. During the fieldwork, it was learned about a few females who quit their job after marriage as their in-laws did not allow them for that.A female MTO explains the issue of social resistance as:

> Parents are always supportive. I am here that is because of my parents, but overall in the family people used to discuss about me and my job. They spread negative things about me. They (relatives) say "see his daughter has become the manager in bank and work with the male employees". I mean we [society] do not accept females working with males (Yumna).

These are not only social gendered beliefs and practices but also different religious orientations of society cause resistance towards female employment. Unfortunately, religious teachings of gender equity and equality in the context of female employment have been misinterpreted. There is a belief that female employment is not allowed in Islam. One female MTOs told that:

> You know many people think that religion not allow female employment. They say that female should remain within the four walls. There is religious pressure as well (Nabiha)

It was known that seven female respondents, in these two locations, received life threats, in one or other form from a specific group. These females were asked to quit their jobs. A female MTO described the life threats in these words:

> Yes we get threats. We received a call that we survived in yesterday's blast but will not survive the next time ... on that day we were very much afraid and were not concentrating on work. We were looking at every customer with lots of doubts. I was thinking about my kids ... it was really horrible (Saira)

In spite of all this it was encouraging to know that female MTOs 'negotiate' both internal and external barriers and are continuing their jobs. This reflects their organizational commitment.

Negotiating Resistance

It was known that female MTOs negotiate internal and external resistance to demonstrate organizational commitment. Family support is very much important to negotiate with internal resistance. One female narrated:

> Yes there are problems when you are working with males. But we have to survive here because I cannot leave my job only because of their (male employees) behavior. At times that happens. Yesterday, there was a problem then I called husband and told him, I would say that the confidence I have is because of my husband. He always supports me (Shakeela)

Numbers of findings suggest that female employees consistently face issues at a male dominated workplace. But, these female employees want to continue their job with this bank. One female explained:

> If we see there is still no concept of female employment in our society. People do not like their females to go out for work. You can see many females if they are in market or in university they are doing pardah (veil) … You know this society ... my relatives were against my job. I told my parents that why I should spoil my education because of them [relative] and then my parents stood with me. (Yumna)

The findings suggest that females MTOs are victims of social and religious inequalities. However, it is encouraging that these female employees are dealing with these inequalities. They do not want to leave their job because of life threats and bombing. This can be a highest possible level of their organizational commitment.

Discussion

Alvesson and Billing (2009) in their book 'Understanding Gender and Organization' discussed the concept of 'Gender Symbolism', which refers to a gendered symbolized nature of jobs. Historically, higher organizational positions were occupied by males. Jobs like managers, pilots, supervisors are associated with males, while nursing, sectary, and housemaid are categorized as females' jobs. Females' absence in higher organizational positions can be linked to societal gendered practices. When a shift of lower level jobs occurs then there is no such reaction but if a power related job is shifted then there is a much stronger reaction, Such as clerk vs. manager. Clerks used to be males, but now females are taking over this profession; however there is no resistance to this takeover. But, there is resistance if there is a case of a manager's takeover because it is a threat to the societal gendered beliefs and practices. If the gender symbolism is much stronger there would be much resistance and opposition for females to move upward in the Organization (Alvesson & Billing, 2009). Our findings also reveal the same.

'Resistance to threat' hypothesis' (Blalock, 1967) can better explain the resistance to female MTOs. This hypothesis suggests that as the proportion of females and minorities increases in the organization, so does [white] male resistance (Pfeffer& Blake, 1987). Blalock used the term minority for black people referring to them as a socially subordinated group. In this study the term minority can be used for female MTOs because they belong to socially subordinated group. In this bank due to the increasing number of female MTOs, there is a perceived threat among male employees of losing their jobs. As a reaction, male employees resist female MTOs to retain and maintain their dominant positions. The level of resistance increases with the increase in the minority group size, if there is the case of control over economic resources. This group competition perspective (Tolbert, Graham & Andrews, 1999) suggests that as a proportion of females in a work group increases, males will display more negative attitudes towards them through economic and political resistance.

In a much broader context, organizational resistance is linked with regional cultural norms and values. Higher organizational positions of female MTOs violate the social beliefs and practices of power (; Acker, 2006; Lukes, 2005). Male employees resist female MTOs because of their higher position. This relates to societal gendered practices of males' domination and females' subordination (Roomi& Parrott, 2008). It is argued that male employees hold strong beliefs inthese societal gendered practices which result in resistance for female MTOs (Ali, Fani, Afzal &Yasin, 2010). It can be claimed that societal gendered practices have strongly influencedorganizational and social resistance for female MTOs. This claim is valid especially in a culture of strong patriarchy.

Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) suggests that males and females (during course of interaction), act in a way to secure and assure their social identity. Hence, it can be said that resistance for female MTOs is due to the protection of males' social identity. The ideology is that females should not come out for jobs because they are not responsible to feed the family (Hakim & Aziz, 1998). This ideology emerges due to the role of religion in informing the gendered practices (Adrees, 2005).

Conclusions

Organizational resistance is closely linked with societal gendered practices and religious beliefs. It can be said that the workplace behaviors are gendered in nature. It seems that male employees, in general, are not in favor of the female empowerment program of the bank and perceive it as an effort by the bank to bring female employees to an equal or higher status. Societal gendered beliefs and practices assign different social identities to males and females; i.e. males as breadwinners and females as homemakers. Deviation from these respective identities is strongly resisted in a patriarchal culture. Female MTOs are seen as adopting those roles which do not align to their social identity. Religious orientation of society also has an important role because of embedded nature of religion and culture. Religious teachings are interpreted within the context of cultural gendered practices and hence impose restrictions on female employment. Specific religious orientations towards females' employment have added to the difficulties of females employees. This reflects the non-monolithic nature of traditional societies, for example, the Pakhtun society. Pakhtun society can be described as Islamic Orthodox, which believes in complete seclusion of females from public life and considers female employment as harmful to societal and religious values.

Theoretical Contributions

This study enriches theoretical understanding of the gendered nature of organizational commitment. Traditional studies on this subject have paid less attention to recognize the importance of 'subjective experiences' of female employees as significant to their organizational commitment. This study has tried to meet this deficiency in literature by capturing the 'lived experiences' of female employees. This study suggests that workplace experiences of female employees are very much important in defining their organizational commitment. It also helps to remove the biasness of traditional jobs and gender models to conceive the organizational commitment of female employees. Perhaps it is the time to discard traditional approaches to the study of gender and organizational commitment and to realize the importance of subjective meaning of gendered organizational commitment. The novelty of the context further helps to enrich the concept of gender and organizational commitment.

Practical Contributions

Findings of this study can be helpful in achieving workplace gender equality and equity through different policy measures. This will help females not only to play active roles in public life but will also help to avoid their social and economic deprivation.

Future Research

Many of the gender studies in Pakistan focus only on the social issue of females (e.g. lack of educational facilities, limited access to health facilities, poverty). Though these are important concerns but the workplace issues of female employees are of much significance to be addressed to increase their participation in economic activities. It can be only possible if we know about the 'lived experiences' of female employees at workplaces. This study will initiate the discussion about the workplace problems of females and will open new avenues for gender studies in Pakistan.

Recommendations

In recent times more females are joining out of home paid employment. To cope with the global challenges, females need to contribute equally toward economic growth. This can be possible if workplace are more conducive to female employment. For this, there is need of consistent research efforts to explore various gender related issues at workplaces and address them accordingly. This will encourage more females to join hands in national economic development.

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