
Use of performance information in Performance Evaluation: An effective tool in minimizing unconscious gender bias in the workplace

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Abstract

Dearth of women in the senior management positions is a global phenomenon with slight national variations. Stereotype based expectation of the people of the positions of power generate unconscious gender bias which leads to biases in performance evaluation of female employees. As a result, they are not promoted to the top management positions and cannot contribute to the decision making process. But Keeping women outside the decision making process is excluding half of the potentiality. Marginalization of women and their potentiality in contributing to economic development, social advancement and environmental protection is a great impediment to global advancement. So discrimination of women in the performance evaluation is to be minimized. Reviewing the related existing literature, this article argues that an effective performance management system with the use of performance information against set goal can reduce gender bias in performance evaluation and expedite the presence of women at the top levels of the workplace.

Introduction

All over the world, women are rarely seen in the executive positions because women's skills are not valued and compensated even though they contribute a lot in these positions (Meier, Mastracci, and Wilson 2006). Men are stereotypically ascribed those qualities which are related to managerial jobs. On the other hand, women are considered unfit for those posts as they are not endowed with the attributes which men own (Rudman and Glick 1999). So the perceived lack of fit of woman gives rise to the expectation that women underperform in the topmost positions and this expectation is reflected in the women's performance evaluation (Lyness and Heilman 2006). The supervisor, the rater cannot go beyond the stereotypically and traditionally perceived belief about women in making critical decision. As a result, capable and competent women are excluded from their desired promotion. Thus gender bias in performance evaluation prevents women from ascending to the top position of the job hierarchy (Lyness and Thompson 2000). But Keeping women outside the decision making process is excluding half of the potentiality. Marginalization of women and their potentiality in contributing to economic development, social advancement and environmental protection is great impediment to global advancement (OECD 2018). Women's role in making a positive impact on the organizational performance by contributing to decision making process or communicating competently or building teams is very crucial. So, for higher productivity and efficiency in service delivery, women's presence in the top positions of the management should be ensured. Research suggests that the complexity of today's organization demands the leadership style which women tend to adopt. Thus formalization of policy and organizational practice especially performance management systems need to address gender perspective issues so that gender biases in performance evaluation could be minimized (Festing, Knappert, and Kornau 2015). This article argues and provides policy implication to the government that performance management systems with the use of performance information against set goal can reduce gender biases in performance evaluation and expedite the presence of women at the top levels of the work organizations. To establish this viewpoint, at first, this article reviews the literature of performance management, gender, stereotype and gender difference, then depicts the picture of how

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gender bias is produced in performance evaluation and lastly shows the failure of the existing process of performance evaluation to counteract stereotypes, prescribes the use of performance information against set goal as the justified evaluation method for minimizing gender bias in performance evaluation.

Methodology

This research aims to provide a new tool to minimize gender inequality in performance evaluation. To do so, the researcher has used the secondary data. Books, magazines and articles, especially the scholarly articles on performance management, gender, and gender stereotype and gender bias are reviewed extensively to establish the viewpoint of the article. After reviewing those documents, the researcher has presented the findings and theories regarding gender and gender bias in performance evaluation based on previous studies. Finally, the appropriate strategy to address gender bias in performance evaluation is recommended.

Literature Review

Performance Management

Performance management dominates the public management reforms in recent decades. Whatever changes are adopted in the public organizations, the ultimate goal of it is to foster and enhance performance (Moynihan and Pandey 2005). Performance management works as a means of identification, measurement and development of individual and teams' performance and making an alignment of the performance of individual and teams' with organizational goal to achieve desired outcomes (Cascio 2014) . But without diagnosis, how an organization comes to know that it has achieved its desired outcomes? Performance evaluation acts as a diagnostic tool to determine it. Performance evaluation is intended to improve the performance of the employees (Latham, Almost, Mann, and Moore 2005). But in many cases, performance evaluation system cannot contribute towards increasing performance rather than the employees are demotivated to work to achieve their desired goal. The reason behind their demotivation is the perception that the evaluation process through which their performance is measured is not fair and the evaluator himself is a biased one. They have this perception because they are not communicated about the individual goal, performance indicators against which their performance is measured (Latham, Almost, Mann, and Moore, 2005). So in all organizations, developing an evidence based impartial performance evaluation mechanism in the performance management system is needed which involves in fixing individual and organizational goal and defining performance indicators against their performance management success and measuring the performance against the set goals and performance indicators. But this is not an easy task. The difficulty lies in putting it into practice. The ability of measuring actual result against a fixed goal determines the success of a performance management system (Fouri 2012). The use of performance information is a successful tool of measuring outcome against the set goals (Moynihan and Pandey 2010). The use of performance information controls the behavior of the employee compelling them to work for the organizational benefits. But only using performance information cannot ensure the organizational productivity and performance efficiency. It is important to adopt an appropriate design of performance information use which is directly associated with improved performance. Research suggest that when decisions are made on the basis of the performance information and preset targets are motivated the employees to achieve those targets, it produces positive result. For facilitating decision, actual results are monitored against the set target. Thus the use of performance information through the mechanism of monitoring aids to make reasonable, legitimate and acceptable decisions and actions (Nitzl, Sicilia and

Steccolini 2018).

Gender, Stereotype and Gender Bias

Doing gender means making differences between girls and boys and women and men and these differences are not ‘natural, essential or biological’. Once differences are made, these differences become essential and inevitable. A human being as individual may be identified as a friend, professor, relative depending on the situation, but the differences between men and women which once are made reinforce always suppressing the identity of the friend, professor (West and Zimmerman 1967). In a research, it is found that a woman became an engineer and she designed a plane. The custom here is that the designer of the airplane is supposed to fly on the maiden flight and after that other engineers and co-workers are offered dinner by the engineer. So, this is natural that the same formalities are supposed to happen in the case of this woman but the co-workers of the new engineer try to convince her not to fly on the plane because of her female identity claiming that she is not fit for this role. This implies that she is considered to be a lady instead of being an engineer by her colleagues. That a woman cannot be an engineer is a socially culturally constructed idea about women (Hughes 1945). This is a stereotyping belief about social groups without having sufficient empirical data. This stereotype means ascribing characteristics to the individual fitting to the characteristics of his or her social group (Ellemers and Barreto 2015). So, when one encounters a man and a woman, he/she automatically and quickly associates that man with leadership attributes and in the case of association with the leadership qualities with women, the process is slower (Eagly and Carli 2007; Nosek et al. 2009) as human beings are “cognitive miser”. They interpret human behavior according to the information they receive from the society, instead of interpreting human behavior on the basis of his or her individual (Reskin 2013). Again, the individual whose characteristics do not conform to the stereotypical expectation, he or she is evaluated negatively (Ellemers and Barreto 2015). Thus, the shared belief about men and women (stereotype) affects women negatively in the workplace in the case of processing information to make decision. Research shows that in spite of having same performance level, men are rated more favorably than women. In this male oriented decision making process, women have to provide more evidence than men to be considered as qualified. Steinpreis, Anders, and Ritzke (1999) in their research found that the same biodata is evaluated differently on the basis of the name (female and male name) written on the top of the bio data. When the biodata is evaluated in terms of the male identity of the top, 77% raters select that person (male) as fit for the required post. But when this same biodata is evaluated with a female name on the top of it, only 44% raters consider her fit for the job. This single incident depicts the gender biasness of the people in power positions. Again women’s accomplishments are more scrutinized than the male. In a research, it is found that women are told to produce evidence to prove that the publication and grants she possesses are her own. In the case of men, this evidence is not required. (Correl 2017). Thus, it is evident that gender stereotype creates gender differences in making important decisions.

The production of gender bias in the performance evaluation

Stereotyping beliefs about women promote gender bias in the workplace. Although these beliefs are ‘functional, automatic, unintentional, and accurate in an aggregate’, these lead to the completion of an inaccurate work evaluation demonstrating a generalization instead of individual’s actual qualities (Devine 1989; Goodwin, Gubin, Fiske, & Yzerbyt, 2000; Macrae, Milne, & Bodenhausen 1994). In the work evaluation process, different aspects of individual compete for becoming noticeable. Sex, being a distinctive and attention getting aspect, reigns the impression formation process (Heilman 1984). When the actions of an employee conform to the stereotype based expectation, his actions are evaluated favorably. But actions inconsistent to the stereotype based expectation are evaluated negatively. Thus the stereotype based expectation results in “biased attribution”. Reskin (2000) explains it very clearly.

According to him, as it is perceived that men are fit for the managerial job, failure of men in such type of work is seen as an accident or bad luck. This failure is not taken as an indication of future failure. But in the case of women, the opposite things happen. Stereotype based expectation predicts that women are not fit for the managerial job. So, when women exhibit their competency in these jobs, their competency and success demands explanation. How have they become successful proving the stereotypical beliefs as false? It is thought that situational factors lead to their success and this success is taken as an isolated incident and it does not signal future success (Swim and Sanna 1996). Again, work evaluation depends on the quantity of information (Davison & Burke, 2000; Heilman, Wallen, Fuchs, & Tamkins 2004; Tosi & Einbender 1985). Research suggests that minimal information other than sex facilitates stereotype base expectation which results in gender biased work evaluation. Little information about the women's performance exhibits less favorable evaluation of women compared to men (Swim, Borgida, Maruyama, & Myers 1989). Because the performance information gap is filled by gender stereotype unconsciously which leads to evaluate male and female differently based on the biased expectation (Reskin 2000). Ambiguity is another condition which amplifies gender bias. Lack of fixed criteria in making decisions, "impoverished, inconsistent or irrelevant" information about the employee and the absence of distinctness of the process of work evaluation provide favorable environment for flourishing gender biased evaluation (Heilman 2012). Narrow definition of success also aids to create bias. When the definition is narrow, certainly the attributes of the dominated group constitute this definition. So it is quite natural that the subordinates whose attributes are not chosen for fixing criteria for the success will be left. Thus "think manager-think male" characterized performance management system prevails in the work organizations worldwide. (Correl 2017). In this way, when this performance evaluation result is used for promotion, women are left behind.

How to minimize gender bias in the women's performance evaluation

The rater, the supervisor in the work organization acts as a bridge between the employees and management, and one of the crucial responsibilities of the supervisor is to make the best use of the human resources (Hamstra, Van Vianen, and Koen 2019). Performance evaluation is the tool by which the supervisor can motivate employees to improve their performance as well as organizational performance. Moreover, it helps the organization to take important decisions specially the decision regarding the promotions of the employees based on the performance of the employees. Thus performance evaluation of the employees is regarded as an important task of the supervisors (Hamstra, , Van Vianen, and Koen 2019). So, this important task, the performance evaluation should be free from all kinds of biases. A great body of research literature deals with this evaluation process. How evaluation error can be minimized is investigated largely, especially the minimization of the gender biases from the evaluation process attracts the researchers greatly. According to Landy (2008), individuating information acts as a deterrent in disappearing gender bias in performance evaluation. The more a rater or decision maker avails the performance related information of an employee, the less the decision maker relies on gender stereotypes as the basis for work evaluation. (Koch, D'Mello, and Sackett 2015). Though Locksley, Hepburn and Ortiz (1982) express the view that individuating information will act to lessen the influence of stereotype but the contrary opinions is also found in the work of Heneman (1977). According to him, individuating information does a little to minimize gender biased behavior and attitude. An example can be cited from Haneman (1977) to support his point. For hiring life insurance agent, mental ability and personality characteristics are judged through a test and in this test male and female achieve identical score, but the male is chosen for this post. This implies that individuating information cannot confirm the impersonal work evaluation. However, unambiguous information about rate's occupational success tends to minimize gender bias in performance evaluation (Heilman 1984). Thus, diagnosis is required for individuating information to counteract stereotypes. The act of diagnosis can be accomplished by motivating the rater or decision maker so that he or she engages herself or himself very closely, spends more time in processing

information for making actual decision. But motivation to make a careful, accurate, impartial and actual judgment or decision takes place only when people are held accountable for their actions ((Kunda1990; Lerner & Tetlock 1999). A feeling of being accountable can be aroused through encouraging the decision maker to make an accurate evaluation depending on the actual performance information of the employee and making them understand that their decision , judgment can affect others (Kunda 1990). Acquainting the decision makers with equity norms can also make them accountable to make accurate work evaluation (Fiske 1993). Thus, accountability and equity norms are important in minimizing gender bias in work evaluation, and for instituting accountability and equity norms, a mechanism or tool is required to design which inevitably establishes the equity norms and accountability of the supervisor, the rater. Performance evaluation through using performance information against the set goal establishes equity norms in the work organization and confirms accountability of the rater. This evidence based performance management system evaluates performance of the employees using the performance information against the set goal. When a rater evaluates an employee's performance depending solely on the preformation information against preset goal, he is bound to be impartial. Because in this evaluation system, the system itself controls the behavior of the supervisor (rater) (Kroll and Vogel 2014). But the use of performance information in evaluation becomes dysfunctional if decision makers show less interest in performance data (Broadbent, Jacobs, and Laughlin 2001; De Lencer and Holzer 2001). Only the 'purposeful use' of performance data on an employee's quality, efficiency and effectiveness against prefixed goal aids to make informed decisions. According to Kroll (2015), the expected result of using service information in performance evaluation is exhibited if a 'prospecting strategy' is adopted. The collection of information in performance evaluation is made 'in a quantitative, aggregated format' and this information collection is not extemporary but it follows a sequence of defining goals, monitoring outcomes, measuring results, and making decisions (Kroll 2015). Thus by using performance information, decision makers can facilitate sound decisions and can justify, rationalize their decisions and actions to their colleagues (Nitzl, Sicilia and Steccolini 2019). Here he evaluates employees' work performance depending on the data against the set goal. So the performance information guides the behavior of the rater. He has not got the opportunity to manipulate the result or evaluate negatively or positively depending on gender stereotype beliefs. Thus I think that an effective performance management system with the use of performance information against any set goal can minimize gender biases in performance evaluation in the workplace and expedite the presence of women at the top levels of the work organizations.

Conclusions

This article shows a new way to overcome the gender bias in performance evaluation to ensure women's presence in the top management level so that they can contribute their full potentiality to higher productivity and effective service delivery. The adoption of a performance management system using performance information against a set goal to take organizational decisions , specially the decisions of employees' promotion will not only remove the gender inequality but all other inequalities (for example, inequality regarding color, race etc.) and will ensure justice and accountability in the organizations. This organizational justice, accountability will motivate the employees to increase the productivity of the organizations. But there are some important factors which need to be addressed in implementing this performance management system in work organizations. Identifying appropriate goals among many conflicting goals of the work organizations is one of them. Eliminating deficiencies in information, motivating employees to use performance information by providing incentives and getting assurance of management to apt with the new system are the other factors to consider in implementing the evidence – based impartial evaluation system (Cavalluzzo and ITner 2004).

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