



GENDER AND CAREER ADVANCEMENT IN THE CORPORATE SECTOR. A CASE STUDY OF THE COOPERATIVE BANK OF KENYA

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Abstract: *The purpose of the study was to find out the influence of gender on career advancement in the corporate sector, a case study of the cooperative bank of Kenya. The objectives of this research is to examine the attitudes of management at the Cooperative Bank of Kenya on the effects of gender on career advancement, to examine the extent to which gender awareness affect career advancement in the banking sector in Kenya and to establish the extent to which gender affects career advancement in the banking sector in Kenya. To undertake the study, a descriptive research design was used. Descriptive research is a study designed to depict the participants in an accurate way. This is because this is a case study which is an in-depth study of an individual or group of individuals. The study utilized quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. A total of 100 questionnaires were administered but only 80 were returned while 20 were not returned. The research concludes that the most significant among the factors that are responsible for the lack of career progression of women in the banking sector are the personal challenges, followed by institutional barriers. Likewise, equal opportunity should be accorded to both genders to accept or decline an offer whether of local or global nature. The traditional assumptions that women are not better candidates for opportunities outside the country must be reviewed and not based on the family front or cultural constraints. The banks should create flexible networking opportunities that enable women too to interact without the hindrances and bottlenecks. If the banks understand their staffing needs and an audit is conducted to find out which gender does what better, policy and awareness should then follow to ensure that there is involvement of all staff members at all levels. Information should be accessed by all to ensure that equal opportunities are available to all genders. The study recommends that there are certain best practices that can be adopted to bring about equity in the banking sector including: ensuring that the excellent policies in place are implemented and adhered to and not skewed by individuals to suit their circumstances. This should be able to eliminate gender stereotyping and the invisible glass ceiling in all areas. Creating awareness in the mind-set of the managers to exercise equality of both genders and to avoid gender discrimination. Education and agility are very critical, and this should help create a balance in diversity and inclusion (D&I) where women should be encouraged to apply for the top competitive jobs.*

Key Words: *career, career choice, career development, career perception, career advancement*

INTRODUCTION

According to global demographic findings, women comprise 50 percent of the total population worldwide. They however are reported to own just a tiny fraction of the world's wealth (1 percent). For instance, in the countries in the European Union (except for Sweden) and Norway, research findings show that in as much as careers are changing in most of these countries, the nature of this change is most ideally described as a gradual erosion of the so-called conventional patterns of work as opposed to a complete turnaround. The effect of this is that it is most-likely bound to improve opportunities for women within the job market. Gender segregation still remains a considerable issue. This is despite the fact that women's rates in work activity has reportedly increased. Females are seen to be heavily dominant in part-time work which is associated with a myriad of limitations in terms of opportunities for training and promotion are still highly prevalent (Newell, 2007).

Gender has often been seen as impacting women's career progression in a negative way. This is more so the case with women being less likely to be promoted than their counterparts of male gender (Kirchmeyer, 2002 cited in Millore et al. (2007). In addition, the concept of gender has many a times been misunderstood as being involved with the promotion of women and women issues only. It is however worth noting that gender issues are cross-cutting in the sense that they focus on the relationship between men and women as well as their roles, access to and control over resources, division of labour, interests and needs. Career paths are pursued both by men and women alike, and by extension, gender differences could end up creating the orientation of one gender to a particular career(s), whilst socialization by virtue of one's gender can be an influence.

In spite of the fact that women in society most often shoulder a larger amount of work, taking the lion's share of in terms of obligation for the upbringing of children as well as engagement in the production of a significant portion of the world's food, it is unfortunate that women are still subjected to segregation when it comes to pertinent economic issues such as the right to own private property. They also undergo the same shunning and sidelining when it comes to access to credit facilities in formally and well established institutions such as banks (UNDP, 2009). Further, the report laid emphasis on the fact that such kinds of inequities were as an offshoot of a myriad of factors such as the lack of access to women's economic opportunities as well as resources, accessibility to land for agricultural activities, credit and technology. On the list was access to opportunities for employment. Thus, the need to addressing gender inequalities should not only be given attention as a developmental goal, but also a way towards the realization of sustainable development. The perceptions that societies have held to a long time about the role of a woman in the labour market has been seen to change significantly over time.

The promotion gender equality and empowerment of women is key to achievement of decent employment for all, which would be central to the eventual stamping out the marginalization and segregation that has for a long time, plagued labour markets across the world (ILO, 2007). Women are known to play the key role of adding value on the basis of the fact that they bring different angles of thought to the debates. Woolley *et al.*, (2010) have given a demonstration of how teams that diverse in terms of gender were seen to perform better their competitors that were homogenous in nature across several various tasks.

Relations along the lines of gender refer to a complex and inter-related system of relations that are

both personal and social. These are based on aspects of domination and power through which both men and women are socially shaped and maintained. It is through this process that they gain access to power and resources. It also sees the allocation of status within society (International Fund for Agricultural Development, 2000). Gender as a discourse is about men and women. Men and women are not alike in various ways. They are also not equal, nor will it come to pass they ever be. This is the case because of the varying physical and biological conditions. Gender as a concept, however, does not make reference to these differences that are manifest in the biological sense, but to the structures in society that are social and cultural, which are used to define what exactly goes into the understanding of what it is to be a “man” as well as what it means to be a “woman” within a certain society and cultural setup (International Fund for Agricultural Development, 2000).

Wirth (2001) notes that there was the unavailability of data from African set up that could be used to compare situations. Indications were clear that, on the basis of hurdles that were perception-based, women find themselves not taking up job positions that would allow them the opportunities in the decision-making platforms as well as engage themselves in policy formulation. According to the United Nations (2000), the participation of women in management and managerial positions in workplaces stands at an average of 15 percent across a total of 26 countries in Africa. It is of significance to ensure that Kenya’s Laws governing labour protect employees especially women who have become key players at global level and are operating in developed economies on the basis of variations over time over recent years. These laws include the Employment Act, 2007, the Labour Relations Acts, 2007, the Occupational Safety and Health Act, 2007, the Work Injury Benefits Act, 2007 and the Labour institutions Acts, 2007.

Hakim (2006) reported that there were studies of women who had successfully attained high status in their careers within the professional and managerial positions were sharing their experiences of processes involved socially. These studies showed, for example, that the numbers of these kind of women had greatly fallen, or in some cases, been completely eliminated their work-life balance problems by choosing to remain childless, or by intentionally lowering their fertility by having one-child families. On the contrary, almost all of their male colleagues of the women who took part in these research studies were married. They had several children, but also with marital partners who characteristically elected to stay at home and become full-time homemakers.

Statement of the Problem

Gaps that exist in senior management positions, leadership and wages levels remain persistent, even in states that promote equality in education as well as uphold a level of economic integration among females that is high as pointed out by the World Economic Forum (WEF) in its annual Global Gender Gap Report (2012). This report by the World Economic Forum posited that a closure of the gender gap at the global level was essential to economic progress and stability. It brought to the fore that there was no country in the Middle East or North Africa that was represented in the top 100 of the index. It was also noted that these were regions often faced the menace of instability and often pointed to when inequality in gender was tabled to discussion.

State Corporations in Kenya are uniquely faced with the challenge of gender balance and application of the principle equal pay for work of equal value sought by legislation such as the Employment Act, Act No. 11 of 2007, Laws of Kenya (Government Printer, 2007) and the National Cohesion and Integration Act, Act No. 12 of 2008, Laws of Kenya (Government Printer, 2008).

The push for gender balance could pose a challenge for the career choice of men working in these corporations. Additionally, State Corporations have over time been faced with the challenge of being perceived as places where it is easy to work without having to exert oneself tremendously and performance standards have been deemed less strict than those of private organizations. Recognizing the need for employers to strive to ensure equality at the workplace between both women and men to take advantage of the benefit from the skills possessed by both for the achievement of their strategic goals and objectives, this research sought to fill this gap by examining the effect of gender on career advancement in the corporate sector. A case study of the Cooperative Bank of Kenya in Nairobi.

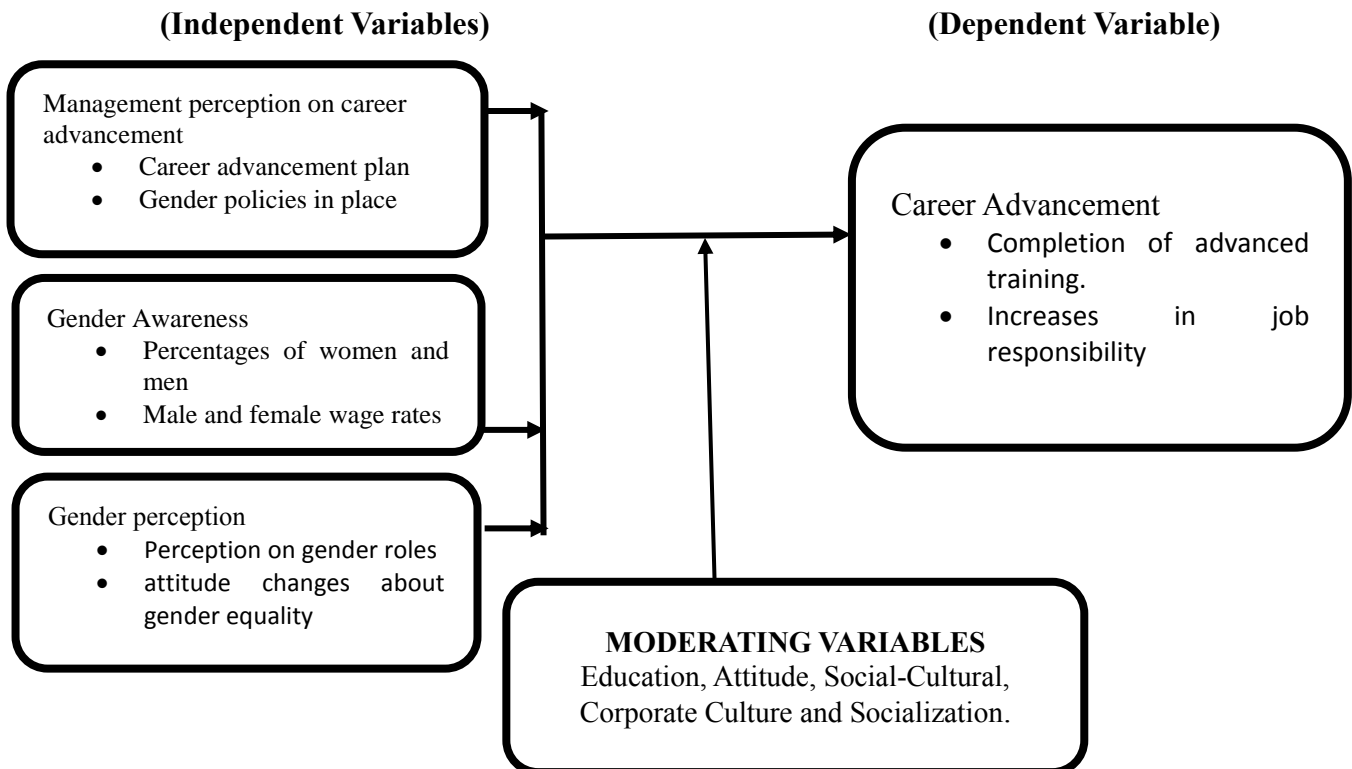
Objectives of the study

The study aimed at investigating the effects of gender on career progression in the corporate sector: A case of Cooperative Bank of Kenya in Nairobi. The specific objectives of the study were,

- i. To examine the attitudes of management at the Cooperative Bank of Kenya on the effects of gender on career advancement.
- ii. To examine the extent to which gender awareness affect career advancement in the banking sector in Kenya.
- iii. To establish the extent to which gender affects career advancement in the banking sector in Kenya.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of these study shows the relationship between the independent variables (management perception on career advancement, gender awareness and gender perception) and the dependent variable (career advancement).



Literature review and theoretical framework

The study was based on two theories namely; The Social Relations Approach and The Feminism Theory. This study was guided by social relations approach to gender and development planning. It was a model propounded by Kabeer (1994). The vital features of the approach are the goal to advancement as human success, the concept of social relations and institutional analysis. The social relations approach demonstrates how gender and other disparities are fashioned and replicated within structural and institutional aspects, as well as to come up with the relevant policies frameworks that can allow women to work to change those factors that limit them.

This study is also informed by the liberal component of feminism school of thought. This theoretical framework which is in collaboration with a series of strands of feminism, has given rise to a rather large body of information. This body makes an attempt to shed light on the gender inequalities and the subjugation of women. Liberal feminists tend to focus their attention on the establishment as well as protection of equal opportunities for women through means that are guided by legislation and democracy.

This school of thought seeks to attain the liberation and enablement of womenfolk through the legitimate use of the existing system which they feel will bring about reforms in a way that is spontaneous and gradual, without the creation of any unnecessary antagonism with the existing structures already in place. It is both a theoretical framework as well as a movement which seeks to challenges all manifestations of bias and unfairness within the contexts of a society that is heavily characterised as patriarchal and capitalistic. It pushes and advocates for the need to recognized and acknowledge women as human being who are equal to their male counterparts. Their end goal is to see the consequent abolition of privileges and prejudices that prescribe to the possession of any biological reproductive organ (Oakley, 1981).

Among the considerable shortcomings of the feminism theory include: the ignorance of the domestic labour of men and the growing economic and educational success of women and thus ignoring the element of choice in gender relationships.

Literature Review

There are a myriad of studies about career success that remain mute or silent with respect to how gender moderates the strength of personal and structural predictors on career outcomes. The current study sought to examine the influence of gender on factors associated with career success. A limitation of related studies is the emphasis on objective career outcomes. The above reviewed literature highlights mixed reactions on the effect of gender on career development. A research study carried out by Ali (2011) pointed out that a majority of women employees were not satisfied with programs in career development. It also showed how women were discriminated against opportunities when it came to matter of career development.

Other researchers such as Bem (1981) and Betz (1994) as cited in (AlMiskry et al. 2009) did point out the factors that were relevant to the development of gender modifications in vocational interest. They put forth the suggestion that the advancement of difference of gender in vocational interests as well as vocational choices were as an outcome of a myriad of factors, some which were internally related while some were environmentally related. These factors include occupational self-concepts, stereotype, self-efficacy as well as personality.

The arguments also posited by Laser and Rosen (1990) showed that both women and men were allocated various job categories due to stereotypic behaviour and occupational opportunities that were equally diverse in job market. Further, Millmore, Lewis, Saunders and Thornhill (2007) took note of the fact that gender had often been found to have a rather negative effect on career progression, with women finding themselves less likely to get promoted than men. Gomez-Mejia et al. (2001) also gave a demonstration with the aim of making an attempt to get ahead in the world of business could be difficult, particularly if one was a woman in Asia. The study also revealed that approximately half of Japan's workforce was female, but only a few are on a career track.

Another research study carried out by Morrison and Glinow (1990) as cited by Ivancevich (2008) brought forth the suggestion that a glass ceiling that was impeding career advancement for women in the upward trajectory was still a reality. The research study therefore proposed that there were still people who held the belief that women and minorities were not endowed with the abilities, smartness, or education to render service as effective managers.

Neathey (2003) also found that the social stigmas such as gender role stereotypes, cultural patterns that were rigid, patriarchal construction of society and less creative stigma on females were the major factors that become the basis for gender discrimination of female employees at their places of work. Based on findings from these previous studies there is gap to be filled by this study in examining the effect of gender on career advancement in the corporate sector, a case study of the Cooperative bank of Kenya.

Research design and methodology

In order to carry out the research study, a descriptive research design was used. The study utilized quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. Specifically, the quantitative data was collected using semi-structured questionnaires while qualitative data was collected using key informant interviews guide and presented in verbatim quotes in thematic fashion and case narratives. Where necessary, verbatim quotes were used to amplify the voices of the informants and strengthen the quantitative findings. For the site description, study population and target population, this research study was based at Cooperative bank of Kenya and was carried out across all the 46 branches located within Nairobi County. The Co-operative Bank of Kenya Limited is incorporated in Kenya under the Company Act and is also licensed to do the business of banking under the Banking Act.

The target population in this study, the staff members and management of Cooperative bank of Kenya across the 46 branches in Nairobi were the constituents of the study population. The study population therefore were the 500 bank employees being the total number. These ranged in the middle and upper management levels within the headquarters, branches in Nairobi and the levels where a gap is evident in women career progression.

The sample size selected for the study was 20 per cent of the target population giving rise to 100 respondent. The study then deployed stratified random sampling technique as it was the most appropriate for the study because the population of interest which was not homogeneous as it had been subdivided into mutually exclusive and heterogeneous sub-populations (departments) called

strata. The study collected the primary data with the aid of a detailed questionnaire.

The data analysis procedure involved coding, editing and cleaning of data in readiness for processing. Quantitative data majorly covered the background profile of the respondents as well as their respective bank branches. The responses they gave were analysed through the use of content analysis.

Results And Discussions

Attitudes of Management at the Cooperative Bank of Kenya on the Effects of Gender on Career Advancement

Organization's job selection process

The findings indicate that 45.5 per cent of the respondents were somewhat aware of the job selection process used by their organization, 39.4 per cent were very aware, 9.1 per cent were not sure and 6.1 per cent of the respondents did not complete this section. The study found out that despite being aware of the job selection process, women have no reservations with promotion especially at lower management levels and a majority of the respondents confirm that women are equally promoted but only up to a certain level. A long serving case narrative informant aged between 50-59 years, with a post-graduate degree said —

Cooperative Bank has wonderful policies that can pass audit well with very little editing. However, application is skewed, and this remains a challenge because we are dealing with human beings some of whom are more creative than others hence management apply what they believe will enable them to achieve the results they want, and this ends up skewing certain results.

Source: Interviewee Five (2018)

During selection and recruitment process of the top managers, the same fair and transparent standard evident at lower level management should be replicated to avoid any gender disparities. The findings concur with Van-Vianen and Fischer, (2002) rationale that existing top management positions are held by men who tend to promote other men who are like themselves.

Fairness of the Organization when it comes to Promotion

The research study sought to find out if promotions were done in a manner that was free and fair. The respondents were therefore asked to share their opinions and views on this. The findings indicate that slightly above half (51.5 per cent) of the respondents said promotions were fair, 21.2 per cent were not sure, 15.2 per cent said that it is unfair, 9.1 per cent said it is very fair and only 3 per cent did not complete the question. An informant with a postgraduate degree and has been in the bank for 6 years said

—Women limit themselves by demanding concessions, for example, you cannot blame the system by expecting it to lower the standard for you because you are a woman. One has the choice of taking up roles now or later as long as they do not conflict with ones' home or work responsibilities. For example, one can take a career break for maternity then come back and hit the road running without fear

that your job was taken. It is a matter of choice – so plan well because women have different challenges from menl.

Source: Interviewee Nine (2018)

The research findings tally with the view by Burke and Nelson (2000) to the effect that 82 per cent of firms stated that lack of general management skills and line experience was a major contributing factor in their decisions not to promote women.

Opinion on the match on remuneration vis-à-vis skills and experience

Out of the total respondents, 45.5 per cent said that their opinion on remuneration match their skills and experience is somewhat true, 21.2 per cent is somewhat untrue, 15.2 per cent is very untrue, 12.1 per cent are not sure and only 6.1 per cent said that it is very true. A postgraduate informant who is an expert in HR matters, has worked for the bank for 6 years and is aged between 40-50 years noted thus:

—Remuneration and benefits match women skills and expertise. However, there could be some differences in pay because of the aggressive nature of men compared to the women when it comes to negotiating salaries. Most of the men demand to know their worth because women are not oriented to demand their rights and if they do, they are viewed as violent. On jobs of equal worth, one finds huge disparities because of their ability to position themselves.

Source: Interviewee Two (2018)

These research findings agree with Burke et al., (2000) who states that some firms have a large pool of qualified women and simply do not consider them for the position on the basis that they are deemed to be an unreliable workforce who will take breaks for child bearing and other familial responsibilities.

Fairness of the Performance Appraisal System

Regarding the fairness of performance appraisals system, 51.5 per cent of the respondents said that it is fair, while 21.2 per cent said it was unfair and 9.1 per cent said it is very fair. An informant with 22 years' work experience aged between 50-60 years commented thus:

A satisfaction survey should be conducted by HR and management confronted with the results. The bank has a policy in place that directly addresses gender disparities at the workplace. However, this is more of paper work than in real application. The reason for this is that the situation of women is complex, and their dual roles make it more difficult for them to balance their roles. At work, the reproductive role is usually overlooked, and this affects their productive role.

Lack of Participation in social and professional events affect career progression of women

Nearly three quarters of the respondents (63.6 per cent) agree to a moderate extent that lack of participation in social and professional events affect the career progression of women; 6.1 per cent while 12.1 per cent were not sure and 9.1 per cent said minimal extent and equal percentage reported no extent. Further probing revealed that participation in such events gives the individual an added advantage in terms of visibility.

The findings tally with what was stated by Ackah and Heaton (2003) that a network of friends, colleagues, and clients can be valuable means to career progression because it can prove beneficial in getting things done. Employees who network with clients look good to management because they help to strengthen the employer's stability (Spiegel, 2008).

Gender Awareness and Career Advancement

Out of all the respondents, 36.4 per cent said that there is minimal extent in gender stereotyping which affect management decision-making process regarding promotion of women in the bank, 30.3 per cent said that there is moderate extent, 15.2 per cent said that they were not sure, and the same number said no extent and only 3 per cent said that it affects promotion of women at Cooperative Bank of Kenya. Gender stereotyping at the work place is acknowledged to exist but the bank has done little to put into place policies to address the issue in an exhaustive, systematic and comprehensive way.

Although the economic activity rate of women of working age has increased (UNIFEM, 2005) and women have moved into some areas previously populated by men, gender segregation remains, as evident from the voice of the informants. It operates both horizontally (across jobs) and vertically (across levels of organizations) and is an enduring feature of most employment contexts. The findings are also in line with Schein (1975, 2001, and 2006) who confirms that gender stereotyping of the managerial role arises when the attributes regarded to be necessary to fulfil the role, are attributed to one sex.

Extent to which mentorship affects promotion

Mentors are viewed as helpful in that they provide participants with job opportunities/challenges to demonstrate skills and abilities, suggested strategies for advancing participants careers, believed in their potential, encourage participants to take risks, share his/her expertise with the participants, and give participants useful career advice.

On the extent to which bank mentorship programs affect the rate at which women get promoted, 36.4 per cent said that they were not sure, 27.3 per cent said to a minimal extent, 24.2 per cent said to moderate extent, with 9.1 per cent saying to great extent and only 3 per cent said no extent (Table 4.5). The research findings can be attributed to the fact that there is no structured mentorship program in COOP BANK hence majority lack awareness and necessity of mentors. This in turn leads to detrimental results for women during promotion. Upon being probed further, some respondents said that the mentorship program is not robust enough to have material effect and most of the staff who have gone through any mentorship program have not progressed and not everybody who goes through the mentorship program gets promoted.

However, on the perception of women's emotional stability vis-à-vis mentorship, she disagrees with Hansen's (2008) findings that male mentors tend to be resistant to mentor a woman because they perceive women as more emotional and not as skilled at problem-solving, and instead categorically emphasized

People with mentors in senior executive roles have a better chance in advancing their career and stand a better chance of getting promoted thus becoming more visible. Unfortunately, with the lack of support from HR, mentorship depends on the hierarchy of the mentor in the organization and the aggressiveness of the mentee. HR can also implement best practices for other organizations to

tap into the 36.4 per cent of staff who are not sure of the effect or importance of mentorship. Women need a few mentored fellows to their name, but it is just as important to be known as a CEO, as it is to be known as a mentor. They should reduce the focus on people lower than themselves as observed by Hansen (2008).

The research findings agree with Kahan (2004) who indicated that online mentoring and co-mentoring are other options being developed to assist women. Firms are beginning to recognize that women workers have special concerns that need to be addressed through programs and policies. Thus, many firms have begun to implement appropriate programs. It is hoped that these programs will increase the career opportunities for women in the senior levels.

Extent to which Gender barriers affect women career progression in the bank

Out of the total respondents, 48.5 per cent said that in their view, the extent in which invisible barriers affect women career progression in the bank is moderate, 24.2 per cent said minimal extent, 12.1 per cent were not sure of the extent, 9.1 per cent said to the great extent and only 6.1 per cent said there is no extent.

The research findings contradict the notion expressed by Rai and Srivastava (2008), who asserts that no glass ceiling exists. They argue that at present, organizations operate in the global context and several opportunities for career development exist. The idea of GC is therefore, just a myth and self-created issue. Inequalities exist because men and women may do the same work, but men get paid more for the work than women.

Work and life balance (WLB) among women affect their career growth

Slightly above half of the respondents (51.5 per cent) said that work and life balance among women is somewhat true that it affects their career growth, 33.3 per cent said it is very true, 6.1 per cent were not sure that it affects, another 3 per cent said it is somewhat untrue and the other one did not fill the field (Table 4.3). The study found out that many women have a problem balancing their work and family lives.

Some organizations have crèches for breast feeding mothers. Others facilitate their female employees to undertake training, relocations, promotions and other upward initiatives by sponsoring spouses and dependents so that family disruption is minimized. Some pay for house helps to accompany such women on trainings and job relocations. Juggling competing demands is tiring if not stressful and brings lower productivity, sickness, and absenteeism, making WLB an issue for all employees in all organizations. Whereas WLB does not mean an equal balance but the capacity to schedule the hours of professional and personal life to lead a healthy and peaceful life, many women who are executives and those in elite occupations cope by making discreet choices between their career advancement and family such as opting out or postponing their marriage and or parenting.

The research supports the view of Mooney and Ryan (2008) who stated that the main concerns in the women's perspectives were the duration or working time that is required longer than they expected in addition to the organization anticipating its managers to be flexible to the needs of the business.

Communication style affects the promotion of women

Of the respondents, (42.4 per cent) said that it is somewhat true that communication style affects their promotion in the organization, 27.3 per cent said that it is very true, 15.2 per cent said that they were not sure, 9.1 per cent said that it was untrue and only 6.1 per cent said it is somewhat untrue. Study results supports the views of Miller (2003) that many women have their communication styles affecting their progression at work and men and women communicate differently and therefore, negotiate differently. The successful female professional must not only understand the gender differences in communication but be able to use them to her advantage as well.

Gender equality and opportunities in the workplace

Above half (54.5 per cent) of the respondents said that it is somewhat true that the organization offers equality of opportunities at the workplace, 30.3 per cent said it is very untrue, 9.1 per cent said it is somewhat untrue and only 6.1 per cent said that they were not sure. Socialization is also a culprit that contributes to women's uptake into occupations and how they conduct themselves therein. Socialization bestows the values that was upheld in society and if they are skewed in favour of men, as they have been, women find it difficult to change from the conditioning of their socialization as this triggers penalty. When women give themselves a C, it may be because in many cultures, women do not praise themselves. They wait to be praised – with of course dire consequences at the workplace. Socialization patterns that discourage a dominant female also determine the leadership roles and responsibilities that women will take at the workplace. Women make friends easily, they can create good relationships and they can mentor. It is time to use all these gifts to their advantage.

This proves that if there is equality at Coop Bank, women are their own worst enemies and place very little value in what they do and should learn to use the social capital they have been naturally gifted to ascend the corporate ladder. The findings agree with the views of Ghada et al., (2009) who said that there is a traditional and orthodox perception that women are less efficient and therefore, are incapable to tackle the problems of the organization as compared to their male colleagues. Due to this myth, the female employees always face obstructions in career progression and various job retention criterions.

Lack of Technical Expertise (specialized skill) contributes to women slow career progression

When asked if lack of technical expertise (specialized skill) contributed to women slow career progression into senior leadership positions, one third (33.3 per cent) of the respondents said that it is somewhat true whilst 15.2 per cent said it was very true as evidenced in table 4.4. Further probing revealed that some women raised concerns regarding opportunities for specialized skill training and being allowed time during work to do this, because due to their commitments outside of work, they would be unable or find it difficult to develop their skills otherwise.

These findings concur with Sujatha (2008) who noted that though women are also taking part in diverse career developing opportunities, still the women representation in the career ladder is very low. The foremost reason is that the private sector needs more technical professionals and they

perceive that female managers are not apposite for this. Therefore, they prefer to take male managers for this purpose because they cannot lose the crucial aptitude of men (as they can handle various types of managerial tasks and troubles).

Talent Classification Pools used as instruments for Succession Planning

Talent is understood to be one of those workers who guarantees the competitiveness and future of a corporation (as specialist or leader) through the organizational or job specific qualification and knowledge, the social and methodical competencies, and characteristic attributes such as eager to learn or achievement oriented (Davis et al., 2007).

Almost half (45.5 per cent) of the respondents believed talent classification pools are used as instruments for succession planning in their organization (somewhat true), 30.3 per cent said it is very true that they are used, 18.2 per cent were not sure and only 6.1 per cent of them said that it is not true. If this tool is used fairly at Coop Bank, there should be more women visible in upper management. Men identify good talent from these pools and make referrals immediately an opportunity arises, or they create one unlike women who rarely support each other. Women need to know that when it comes to judging a woman, either the scale used for her is different or the scale that is supposed to be used for all people does not apply to men. To be successful in your career, women need a strong support system and a proper mechanism to identify and refer the best workers.

Research has shown that women tend to be overlooked in many talent management initiatives due to their being considered as not having the capacity or that they may not be worth investing in because they may leave their job for family or even thought of as being not interested in those activities (Schein, 2007) and this tallies with the findings above.

Training enhances women career development

Training provides more opportunities for career progression because it may boost competence levels of individuals and the organization. It is, therefore, seen as vital for career advancement for employees in general and managers. This was evident from the questionnaires and interviews as reflected in table 4.6 in which the findings indicate that above half (51.5 per cent) of the respondents said that their opinions on training to enhance career development in the bank is somewhat true, 33.3 per cent said it is very true, 9.1 per cent were not sure and 6. per cent said that it is somewhat untrue. This is a clear indication that training is critical for career progression of women. Unfortunately, non-compulsory training opportunities are often passed by women because of the difficulty of dual role play. The findings concur with Beardwell et al., (2004) that individuals should expect rewards for their training or development; they have put in effort, become more skilled and these can come in the form of promotion, pay increase and more demanding or higher status jobs.

Attitudes of Management at the Cooperative Bank of Kenya on the Effects of Gender on Career Advancement

During selection and recruitment process of the top managers, the same fair and transparent standard evident at lower level management should be replicated to avoid any gender disparities. Men are promoted faster and are sometimes seen as more qualified and dedicated because, unlike women, they advertise their achievements, seek active social networks, and are more proactive in

identifying and seeking to fill promotion slots. Women have to work more than double to be recognized at the work place.

Gender Awareness and Career Advancement

The notion of equal opportunity that many employers give where they purport to treat all potential employees the same to create a gender balance is not true. Although the job adverts state that they are equal opportunity employers, many a times, organizations do not uphold the same values more so, if those invited for the interviews are in favour of the men. Personal challenges are the highest cause of lack of career progression of women in the banking sector. These personal challenges are mainly work/life balance, undertaking challenging assignments, equality and lack of technical expertise. Where family demands are concerned, ambitious women seldom rely on organizational support for fear of reinforcing the communal stereotype.

Communication style hinders women because they tend to circumvent issues. Some of them are not open and transparent, unlike the men. The women have recommended that they should create a balance on boldness and courage. Personal challenges that affect women are also due to patriarchy and this discrimination is extended to the workplace where such skewed interaction between males and females continues. These results are found to be frequent and their disruptive effect creates unequal allocation of duties, responsibilities and privileges because of gender.

Gender and Career Advancement

When asked if lack of technical expertise (specialized skill) contributed to women slow career progression into senior leadership positions, one third (33.3 per cent) of the respondents said that it is somewhat true whilst 15.2 per cent said it was very true as evidenced in table 4.4. Further probing revealed that some women raised concerns regarding opportunities for specialized skill training and being allowed time during work to do this, because due to their commitments outside of work, they would be unable or find it difficult to develop their skills otherwise. These commitments were related to caring for children and family which indicates the extent to which being prime careers impacts upon employment progression and deepens gender inequalities. Because of this, the organization develops some stereotypic attitude related to the promotion and appointment of the female workers. Women attribute their success to working hard, luck and help from other people. Men attribute their success to their own core skills. That is why for men, any favour or extra work they do is used to acquire an ally, it is a strategy; for women, it is all about relationships hence barriers in career progression.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that there are certain best practices that can be adopted to bring about equity in the banking sector. This can be done by doing the following:

Creating awareness in the mind-set of the managers to exercise equality of both genders and to avoid gender discrimination. Education and agility are very critical, and this should help create a balance in diversity and inclusion (D&I) where women should be encouraged to apply for the top competitive jobs.

Mentoring and coaching is very necessary, and the bank should have a structured staff mentorship programme in place. Informal mentoring, online or co-mentorship should also be encouraged as it helps create a mentor/mentee rapport and strive for excellence. The mentors should help and

protect their mentees throughout their career progression.

Reviewing the workplace norms and practices so that they are not seen as an impediment to the women's careers progression. Once the above are achieved, the banking sector can be one of the best places for women to exercise their boardroom capacities and the country was a great beneficiary in the long run.

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