Achieving organisational success by the advancement of gender to reach top positions in modern day contemporary workplaces: Can Human Resource Management (HRM) offer thismuchneeded panacea?

[DeepikaFaugoo]

Abstract—**This is one of the only few papers dealing with the relationship between gender inequality in employment and HRM principles and practices to eradicate or ameliorate it. This is a conceptual paper which encompasses a theoretical reflection about HRM principles and practices and the potential impact they have on remedying gender inequality at managerial levels with the resultant outcomes of achieving organisational success that has been corroborated by empirical secondary findings from several countries. This paper comes up with an HRM conceptual theoretical model that needs empirical analysis and advocates that modern day workplaces move towards adopting such a model.**

Keywords-Gender inequality, Women in managerial positions, HRM principles and practices, HRM Conceptual Model

I. *Introduction*

There has been a growing scholarly interest in women's working lives in recent times, which has widened our insight of career trends of women in the work-force(Tlaiss and Kauser 2011; Broadbridge 2007; Simpson et al, 2010).Studies show that in most countries of the world, the glass ceiling still remains an impenetrable barrier that prevents women to reach highest levels within organisational hierarchies with the top levels considered to be a male fortress (Wirth, 2001).Most of such studies have correspondingly called for the adoption of human resource management best practices which promote inclusion of gender and greater diversity within the work milieu. Subsequently several HRM scholars have advocated that the entire vehicle of HRM should be looked at for the advancement of gender in the work-place(Hareletal,2003;Dickens,2001) especially for women in managerial positions. The advancement of women managers could result in several positive consequences such as organisational success and improved quality of life that is much needed for businesses, national and societal contexts in current times(Harel et al,2003).It also asserts that HRM principles and practices that can remedy gender inequality need to be advocated, prescribed and espoused by CEO's, Top-management teams, HR managers and practitioners,

Author Name DeepikaFaugoo

University of Technology Mauritius

policy makers, academics, women advocates and women managers themselves, as this is increasingly needed in today's modern day contemporary work-place and HRM can offer this much needed panacea.

II. Gender and HRM

An understanding of the term gender has been provided by the World Health Organisation(WHO,2014)"Gender" refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women(www.who.int/gender). For this study gender refers to the managerial roles carried out by women in organizations. The HRM function can be responsible for creating awareness about the importance of gender diversity in the work-place, with several HRM scholars advocating the proper use of high quality HRM principles and practices which have the potential to lead to fairness in the promotion of managerial women with positive consequences of organisational success(Harel et al, 2003).This has been highlighted in a pertinent study on Barriers to the career progression of women in senior management positions in the public service of New Zealand (2000) (pl. see www.ssc.govt.nz) that emphasized the proper and careful use of HRM practices and processes can have favorable outcomes for women and their employing organisations. This study advocated the use of formalized, merit-based, validated HRM processes and practices to reduce bias in selection and recruitment. It also emphasized the need to ensure equal opportunities for training and development to all employees, especially for women managers as they traditionally have had limited access to development opportunities that build their credibility to advance to senior levels in organizations.

III. Literature Review

(Legge, 1995)The fundamental philosophical underpinning of HRM is the valuing of all human resources and utilisation of human resources to obtain competitive advantage and achieve the strategic needs of the business, which inherently implies the valuing and utilisation of women's managerial talent and the competitive advantage that it can provide.Organisations that value their human resources may thus offer more opportunities to advance women and put them at the fore-front and may choose to implement HR practices that are beneficial to women managers. This is becoming increasingly important, as over the last three decades there has been a restrained rise in the numbers of highly skilled female professionals and women managers across different industries.Despite the large influx of women entering professions and domains that have been the reserve of men and one such salient one is the domain of

management. Gender inequality at managerial levels still stubbornly persists, in most countries of the world with women still earning less than men, in some cases, considerably less and are mostly found in the lower ranks of the organizational hierarchy, are segregated into 'women's' jobs and tend to work part-time(Wirth, 2001;Durbin et al., 2010).Subsequently as women's access to education and training continues to improve, providing many with the necessary qualifications to aspire to jobs in senior management (Wirth, 2001). It is also understood that women are desirous of pursuing managerial careers and prepare themselves by gaining professional qualifications (Ackah and Heaton, 2002).In spite of this investment in management studies at tertiary level, women often confront a glass ceiling, which they are frequently unable to shatter (Hannagan, 2005) and though women are increasingly obtaining educational qualifications parallel or higher than men, this still does not translate into equality in various dimensions of employment.

Several agencies such as governments, businesses, trade unions, media, academics, policy makers and women's organisations the world over have strongly campaigned that overcoming attitudinal and institutional discrimination that bars women from certain jobs and hinders their career development have to be eradicated(Wirth,2001). The failure of women gaining entrance into the workforce and their inability to attain the highest management positions can be described as 'glass ceiling' or 'glass wall' (Tlaiss and Kauser2010 pp.2).The 'glass ceiling' perspective denotes an impenetrable barrier, which is invisible and prevents upward movement while 'glass wall' refers to lateral movements in organisations.There is also the problem of the 'sticky floor' that describes the forces that keep women stuck at the bottom rungs in organisational hierarchies(Wirth,2001)
International Labour Organisation(ILO) research and analysis suggest that in the largest corporations worldwide discrimination is greatest where the most power is exercised, thus the higher one climbs, the larger the gender gap with a mere 1 to 3 per cent of women holding top executive jobs internationally.This international trend is reflected in a recent census carried out by Catalyst which elucidates that in 2010 more than 30% of companies had no women senior officers(Wirth,2001; Catalyst Census).It is also acknowledged that many women have to conform to gendered organizational structures with gender discrimination, both overt and subtle, existing in the careers of women in managerial ranks with work-places being the main repositories for the creation and propagation of gender inequalities within society(Connell, 1987, 1990; Alvesson and Billing, 2002).The main challenge that organisations face is the slow pace in creating a critical mass of talented women to be propelled in top jobs at the highest levels of organisational hierarchies.

(Mandy et al,2001) highlight that in recent years many HR practices are used in organizational practice to increase the number of female managers that are changing recruitment sources from conventional to non-conventional labour markets, such as advertising in female magazines and gender-neutral advertising, It also suggested that the selection process should encompass at least one woman on the selection committee, the training of selectors, and the use of modern selection processes such as objective assessment center method. Other HR practices are those that want to assist the combination between work and family-care, childcare, parental leave arrangements, and flexible working and being the guardian of Equal Opportunity Employment(EEO). It is therefore becoming increasingly important to investigate whether these practices are effective in increasing the number of female managers to higher levels and the resultant benefits that can accrue to organisations.

IV. Empirical findings on Gender, HRM and Organisational Success

The results of a recent McKinsey(2010)global survey highlights there is a direct connection between a company's gender diversity and its financial success and in those companies where diversity is a higher priority executives also report a higher share of women in their senior ranks, despite this companies still take few actions to support women in thework-force. Another study conducted by McKinsey & Company(2007) as part of its global partnership with the Women's Forum for the Economy & Society titled "Women Matter" confirms the existence of the gender gap most notably in the composition of corporate management bodies. The study suggests that the companies where women are most strongly represented at board or top-management level are also the companies that perform the best. The findings of the global survey by McKinsey & Company (2010) on the need to move women to the top highlighted the need to re-engineer the human resource management process such that all major HR functions such as recruitment, performance appraisal and career-management systems have an understanding of the needs of women managers and do not hold women back in their professional development. The study came up with a series of useful recommendations which were as follows: i) companies must not discriminate between the relatively younger and senior experienced women so as to avoid losing out on the potential of the mature and experienced women manager. ii)The HR manager must be able to identify high-potential women managers and develop individualized career-paths, for such women to enhance their commitment and retention.iii)The human resource function should sensitize front-line managers for spotting potential women candidates, which also involves including one meritorious women on every list so that they can be sought for carrying out higher responsibilities iv) It also asserted the need for organising training for recruiters and operational managers to make them aware of the importance of diversity and identify prejudices that affect their decisions v) Further, this study emphasised that flexibility in the management of human resources goes hand in hand with flexible working and underlined the importance of offering flexibility to women.

The Mckinsey study highlighted several benefits of promoting gender diversity at the top level mainly that it leads to organizational excellence, is an asset for corporate and brand image that helps bring the company closer to its employees, its shareholders, investors and its customers. This study emphasized that the educational attainment of women was increasing, i.e. women account for 55% of university graduates in Europe, but they are a smaller part of the labour market and their employment rate is 21% lower than that of men. In companies within Europe women are particularly under-represented in management and decision-making representing on average just 11% of the membership of the governing bodies of listed companies. It also most importantly stressed the need to adapt the human resources management process to not hold back women but to enable them to be propelled and advanced to reach senior position for the benefit of their organizations and societal and national contexts at large.

Studies also advocate that better the equality between the sexes in national and societal contexts termed as 'gender-egalitarianism' the more it leads to opening up elite male-dominated domains to women(Ramirez and Wotipika,2001), and in such backgrounds women can be able to reach top positions, as people reject traditionally ascribed gender roles and apply normative standards of 'equal opportunity' in their behaviour(Charles and Bradley 2002, pp. 576).Gender egalitarian values transport norms of equal opportunity for women and men in hierarchy whereby attitudinal barriers against women will be consecutively reduced and career aspirations are likely to become more similar among female and male managers(Brandl et al., 2007).

Dreher's longitudinal studies on work-life HR policies in 72 large corporations in the U.S indicates that the number of work-life HR policies (i.e. initiatives to help employees manage the interface between work and important family and life responsibilities), such as flexible working, parental leave, maternity leave, job sharing, telecommuting, being able to work at home, adoption, eldercare benefits and generous childcare benefits/schemes are most likely to be particularly useful to women given that women largely experience work-family conflict. Dreher's empirical findings on work-life policies highlight that a profusion of work–life HR policies will send a message to prospective female employees that the company sees the pool of female managerial talent as valuable and is taking measures to fully make use of this resource by developing relevant work-life HR policies to attract and retain female managers and in the long run this is positively associated with a higher proportion of top-level managerial positions held by women(Dreher,2003).

Several studies also highlight the importance to help women understand the dominant company codes and nurture their ambition, whereby coaching, network-building or mentoring programs within the company can be highly effective in raising women's awareness of the limitations they impose on themselves and enabling them to manage their careers in a male-centric environment.This also creates opportunities for broader professional exposure and also raises the profile of female leaders in organizations which is essential in helping younger women to identify withrole models. It is also a must to have the support of the CEO and top management for the advancement and progression of women(Pomeroy, 2007; Mattis 2002).

Another very significant area that can be beneficial to the women in the work-force has been a call for HRM to become the guardian of EEO (Equal Employment Opportunity) in organisations, which encompasses protecting the equal employment opportunity (EEO) rights of employees and job applicants, which are important human resource functions that have both legal and ethical implications. Consequently research has found that the human resource function is the main propeller of change on equity issues and even where there is support from senior managers, it has been found that many EEO initiatives have been driven by HRM and this can create opportunities for women to be treated fairly and reach higher levels in their organisations(Catteneo et al.,1994;Konrad and Linnehan,1995).

Konrad and Linnehan(1995) study in the U.S distinguished between the two explicit approach of HRM to EEO, the 'identity-conscious' and the identity blind, which is aware of the different work groups in organisation's, especially the classically disadvantaged which are gender and minorities and the implicit approach, which treats all with no differentiation the'identity-blind'. Their findings from organisations in the U.S encourage the use of the 'identity-conscious' approaches to enhance employment of 'protected groups' such as women and minorities.

The selection process is one where there is gender bias especially by male managers also it is acknowledged that women discriminate less than men so this appears to provide a level of justification for having women involved compulsorily in the selection process (Bennington,2006). Thus in situations where interview panels are used, it would be necessary to include a woman on the interview panel to protect EEO. In the public sector in Australia it has long been the practice to include a ''mandatory woman'' on selection panels and other countries would certainly benefit from this proposition (Bennington, 2006,pp.19).

Soft HRM a popular concept that has gained widespread acceptance is associated with developmental humanism and high-commitment work-systems (Legge, 1995;Walton, 1985; Wood, 1996).(Steele,1992) believes that, where the accent is on the individual and women are seen as a valued asset which is the case of the soft hrm model, organizations could be encouraged to introduce benefits such as flexi-time, workplacenurseries and career breaks to help women with family or caring commitments. In this way, those women particularly valued by the organization could benefit at the discretion of management.

The emerging concept of women-friendliness can be defined as the extent to which organisations accommodate women and protect their interests and how much such behavior is interwoven into the corporate culture.Women-friendliness refers to the nature of the organizational policy framework and

the degree to which that provides for women the opportunity to integrate personal, work, marital and family roles successfully and from an organizational perspective women-friendliness refers to how easy it is for women to work, have a career and feel valued within the organization.The HRM function can play a crucial role in the promotion of women-friendliness depending on the status and prestige that it has and the support from top management. The role that HRF can play in achieving women-friendliness will vary according to the extent to which the HRF is viewed as integral to the achievement of long-term goals and objectives.

(Catteneo et al.,1994)study on Canadian organisations proposes an architectural version of HRF that focuses on long-term design and planning, is flexible and change-oriented. They propose that an architectural HRF will be more beneficial to the promotion and advancement of women in organizations especially at managerial levels. Their study postulates the importance of the high prestige of the HRF functions and claims that the HRF has high functional prestige in people-driven and integration-driven organizations which views HRM concerns as fundamental to long-term organizational adaptation and survival. In such organizations, the HRF would play an important role in the setting of women-friendly policies in comparison to organisations that have a low status and low prestige HR function. It is also worth noting that organisations can also become women-friendly as a result of external pressures that enforce compliance with equal opportunity employment legislation(EEO) and through the activities of internal 'champions', i.e. persons who are pushing for this particular objective and explains that the role of the HRF is worth examining in either case. It is necessary for top management to be supportive and the attitude of the CEO (for or against women-friendliness), is also vital in promoting women-friendliness. They also suggest that women-friendliness can be realised by organisational purpose that considers the creation of an accommodation-centered corporate culture as a strategic business imperative in organisations and subsequently proposes a Transformational HR strategy that is change oriented and considers the achievement of employment equity as an astute business decision. The study concluded that the transformational HRM strategy, a high prestige HRF and Employee Champions committed to the advancement of women is the most conducive to promoting women-friendliness
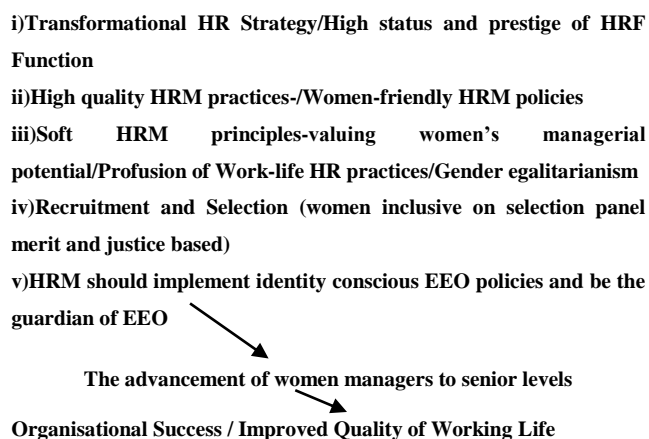
Such trends have been investigated in a innovative study by Harel et al.,(2003)that draws on the literature of three streams of management studies human resource management (HRM), women in management and organisational effectiveness and these three perspectives were bought together into a single comprehensive framework and subsequently tested in Israeli organisations. Their findings establish that there is a positive relationship between HRM practices, fairness in the promotion of women into managerial positions and organisational effectiveness and both fairness in the promotion of women into management and overall organisational effectiveness are associated.

Harel et al.,(2003)studies also show that high-quality HRM practices such as recruitment, selection, compensation and reward, participation, internal labour market and training was associated with fairness and promotion of women in managerial ranks resulting in enhanced organizational effectiveness.These cumulative theoretical and empirical findings of HRM principles and practices and the advancement of women managers have resulted in the conceptual theoretical model (Fig i) that will need to be empirically assessed.

V.   Conclusion

A Conceptual HRM theoretical model has been generatedby the empirical review that includes the main indentified HRM principles and practices that can lead to the advancement of women managers with resultant benefits of Organisational Success. This conceptual HRM model has much significance in modern times, as women's managerial talent is going to be increasingly needed in the future and is going to give organisations the competitive advantage to survive in a changing diverse global workplace. Eventually this conceptual model will have to be empirically tested which is where this research study is headed. Thereafter it will be prescribed that modern day contemporary work-places should move towards this model for the advancement of women managers with resultant accrued benefits of organisational success.

Fig i)HRM Conceptual Model for advancement of women managers

i)Transformational HR Strategy/High status and prestige of HRF Function

ii)High quality HRM practices-/Women-friendly HRM policies

iii)Soft   HRM   principles-valuing   women's   managerial potential/Profusion of Work-life HR practices/Gender egalitarianism

iv)Recruitment and Selection (women inclusive on selection panel merit and justice based)

v)HRM should implement identity conscious EEO policies and be the guardian of EEO

The advancement of women managers to senior levels

Organisational Success / Improved Quality of Working Life

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About Author :**MrsDeepikaFaugoo**

Currently working: Senior Lecturer Department of Business Management and Law- School of Business, Management & Finance, University of TechnologyMauritius

Full international address: MrsDeepikaFaugoo, I Meldrum Street, Curepipe, Mauritius

MrsDeepikaFaugoo is Senior Lecturer in the School of Business, Management & Finance University of Technology Mauritius.She is a registered PhD student at the University of Technology and is actively pursing her PhD in the area of HRM and Gender and has attended several international conferences and presented research papers. Her research focuses on the advancement and career progression of women in management through human resource management practices. .

MrsDeepika Faugoo

This paper results in a conceptual theoretical model that includes the main indentified HRM principles and practices that can lead to the advancement of women managers with resultant benefits of Organisational Success