

Community Dynamics and Women's Leadership Development in the Indian IT Industry

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Abstract:

Context: Women are now an integral part of India's Information Technology (IT) workforce, but only a small percentage attain senior leadership positions. While much of the existing research has focused on the barriers that restrict women's career advancement, less attention has been paid to the support systems that enable women to succeed. In comparison, community based initiatives as a means of supporting leadership development have received much less academic interest. In Women in Tech, internal communities of practice, Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) and peer learning networks, there are opportunities for mentorship, collaboration, skill-building and professional support which can help women advance into leadership positions. Examining these enabling mechanisms can enhance understanding of women's leadership development in Indian IT industry.

Research Problem: Conducted at the research stage of a PhD program, the purpose of this study is to discover how participation in institutional and informal professional communities affects women's ambitions, confidence, and career progress. The research is based on theoretical constructs such as Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), Communities of Practice (Wenger, 1998), and the Relational Theory of Gender and Power (Connell, 1987) and revolves around the following key research question: In which manner do community dynamics in Indian IT industry influence women's paths to leadership?

Theoretical Framework: The research has a basis in three different theoretical frameworks. Wenger's (1998) model of Communities of Practice is used to argue that collaborative learning among the professional community facilitates one's development of identity, competencies and sense of membership – all crucial ingredients of the leadership ambition. Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory illustrates the role of peer modelling and experience in the development of self-efficacy, especially among women lacking role models of leadership in their organizations. Connell's (1987) Relational Theory of Gender and Power offers an account of the community processes in the context of a larger framework of structural inequalities in the Indian IT industry shaped by the principles of hegemonic masculinity that dictate informal selection criteria for leaders.

Methodology: The research method is mixed-method in nature. The quantitative side gathers data via survey questionnaire administered to women working in IT in metropolitan cities across India including a sample of women from both ERGs and communities of practice. The qualitative side involves semi-structured interviews with women who are engaged in Women in Tech communities and peer learning networks. Currently, data is being collected and initial analysis of the pilot interviews

and descriptive analysis of some of the survey responses is being carried out informing the theoretical propositions of this paper.

Expected Findings: From theory and the initial analysis of the data it is hypothesised that active involvement in ERGs and communities of practice will positively relate to female leaders' sense of leadership efficacy, professional visibility, and access to informal mentorship. It is also hypothesised that organizational support of communities, community psychological safety and the strength of community leadership will play significant mediating role. Finally, it is also expected to provide evidence for the compensatory function of peer learning networks on women's deficient access to structural sponsorship and mentoring relationships in the sector.

Implications: The study makes a theoretical contribution to the intersection of gender studies, organizational behavior, and leadership development literature within the developing economy setting. In terms of practical implications, the study aims to provide the empirical support and evidence-based recommendations that organizations and HR practitioners can use in order to close the gender leadership gap in the Indian IT sector using a large-scale and community-led model. The study thus proposes that ERGs are established in an institution-based manner, investment is put into the support for peer-learning infrastructure, and recognition is given to community leadership within broader definitions of employee professional development and advancement plans.

Keywords:

Women in leadership, Employee Resource Groups (ERG's), communities of practice, peer learning networks: gender diversity in india, leadership self-efficacy.