

Push and pull factors: influence on female managers and executives' exit from the workplace, impact on job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

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Abstract

The entry of women into the professional world has, without a doubt, changed the dynamics of the workplace over the past few decades. That observation still holds true today and becomes more prevalent with the changing face of the labor market in terms of diversity. However, in spite of that strong overall female presence, there still exists an unfair share between the number of women compared to the number of men holding high managerial and executive positions. Women experience difficulties advancing in their careers because of various factors that Hewlett and Luce (2005) divided in two separate categories called “push” and “pull”.

This research attempted to determine how those factors negatively influence job satisfaction as well as organizational commitment, and therefore increase women’s propensity to leave the workforce even after they have achieved somewhat high levels in their career. Ultimately, the research provided some recommendation approaches to assist organizations in implementing effective retention initiatives. In addition, the study presented potential implications that organizations should consider based on primary research results.

Keywords: women managers, female Managers, push factors, pull factors, job satisfaction, retention initiatives

Introduction

Schwartz (1989) emphasizes on the role of women in management as a competitive advantage by stating that it is important for businesses to recognize that female managers are part of a talent pool that is essential to be retained and developed. The U.S. Department of Labor’s Bureau of Labor Statistics revealed in its 2003 projection that women will represent 62% of the labor force by 2015 (Helms & Yasin, 2007). When it comes to the hospitality industry, more specifically in the lodging sector, the American Hotel & Lodging Association revealed in its 2004 study that 67.8 % of females were hired compared to 32.2% of males. However, in spite of a strong overall female presence, an unfair share is still observed in the decrease of the number of women compared to the increase in the number of men who hold managerial positions. The number of female hires (55.8%) for managerial positions dropped while that of male hires (44.2%) increased. The unfair share in number gave rise to the “glass ceiling” concept, defined by the Department of Labor as a “composite of artificial barriers based on attitudinal or organization bias that prevents qualified women from advancing upward in their organizations into senior level positions” (Brownell, 1994).

Hewlett and Luce (2005) in their study of the “glass ceiling” concept in the business world brought forth two categories of factors that are the main causes behind women leaving the workforce. First, there are the “push” factors which stipulate that women who leave their jobs are

forced to opt-out of mainstream careers because they do not find the fulfillment they were expecting upon entering (Belkin, 2003). They are “pushed” away by their organizations because they find their jobs meaningless, are not exposed to more career opportunities, have minimal mentoring support, are not acknowledged for their work, and experience low job satisfaction. Then, there are the “pull” factors which exist outside of the workplace; they take form in attending to family demands and needs such as bearing children, raising children, attending to elderly parents, and/or enduring the pervasiveness of a highly traditional division of labor at home.

Purpose of the Study and Importance of the Study

Women bring an element of diversity that cannot be ignored. However, the fact remains that they are still underrepresented in the managerial ranks of many sectors of the business industry as a whole. The hospitality industry, in particular, is as much affected by the limited number of women in executive positions because women’s prominence in the high ranks of their organizations is fairly recent. Although, women’s presence in all ranks has started to thrive, it is not without difficulty; women are still perceived as not strong enough to carry on great responsibilities that await them in the high levels of their organizations.

The purpose of this study was to identify and examine factors that female managers and executives in the hospitality industry consider to be susceptible to influence their job satisfaction, particularly elements that comprise the push and pull factors. Furthermore, the study attempted to attract attention on the importance of retention initiatives for women in all ranks of the organizations, and more so in the highest positions.

Literature Review

Push Factors

The first main factor is the *glass ceiling*, whose origin is explained with opposite perspectives from both men and women. Knutson and Schmidgall (1999) summarized those views and discovered that men identified time as the enemy, stating that women’s experience with the corporate environment is limited compared to that of their male counterparts, therefore their presence has been too short to gain the background that qualifies them for promotions to higher positions. On the other hand, women emphasized the preconceptions and stereotypes about their professional capabilities and commitment as the main reasons. Women add that the sustainability of the *old boys’ network*, which is an exclusive circle of executive men who are well connected and hold great influence over the business world (Elmuti, et al., 2003), and the inhospitable climate they experience at work through the unfair treatment they get from their male colleagues and superiors, are both barriers to their advancement.

The glass ceiling has also given way to what Guerrier (1986) calls the *status-leveling concept*. It refers to “the way in which being female lowers a person’s ascribed status, while being male raises it” (p.9), which is based on the assumption that women are more likely to hold subordinate jobs, while men are more likely to hold higher posts. For example, the female manager is taken for the secretary and the male nurse is taken for the doctor.

Tokenism has also created a great challenge for women who have succeeded in breaking the glass ceiling. Women are entering an environment in which their social category has been disproportionately represented (Elmuti, et al., 2003), they encounter difficulties being influential and accepted as equals, and as a result, perceive that their new situation makes it harder to gain the trust of male peers.

Finally, there is the *lack of or minimal mentorship opportunities*, which raises difficulties for women to get access to promotions, higher income, and ultimately increase in their career satisfaction (Blake-Beard, 2001). The lack of mentoring programs reflects less opportunity for women to look up to someone they would consider a role model and who can guide them on their way to higher managerial functions. Certainly, those women who are hoping to receive some form of recognition about their performance – elements regarded as essential for advancement and usually supported by mentors – do not necessarily get it. One bigger obstacle women face is the trouble finding female mentors. Indeed, as many women are excluded from some networks because of their gender, they would benefit more from the advice of women who have faced similar hurdles in their careers (Elmuti, et al., 2003) rather than feeling uncomfortable in a cross-gender mentoring relationship (Linehan & Scullion, 2008).

Pull Factors

One of the main pull factors is the choice women have to make between being Career-primary or Career-and-family oriented. The former place all their focus on their careers, do not hesitate to take on assignments that require long hours and sacrifice, and choose not to have children until later in life if at all. The latter encounter the conflict of balancing life at work and at home, and want the opportunity to be successful at both. Oftentimes, they find themselves having to choose between career growth and the freedom to be active in family life. Being career-and-family oriented is a conflict most women in higher ranks have had to face while their attention would be more on one than the other (Rosin & Korabik, 1991).

Moreover, women who are more likely to place the demands of family before their career leave the workforce because they have to tend to elderly parents in addition to raise children. They are considered part of the “sandwich generation” and are usually between the ages of 41 and 55 years-old (Hewlett & Luce, 2005)

Finally, the traditional division of labor stipulates that women are expected to assume domestic responsibilities because it is their primary role. Additionally, they may not have the support of a spouse to “fulfill the emotional and logistic needs” (Schwartz, 1996), which can discourage employers from nominating them for higher ranks since their new positions require tremendous focus and commitment. Women working for organizations that do not accommodate them with flexible work arrangements may damage their careers, and are not always certain that they will be able to resume career momentum and maintain opportunity for future upward mobility (Schwartz 1996).

Job Satisfaction

Overall, the hypothesis is that the push and the pull factors affect female managers’ job satisfaction. The latter is defined as “the result of a comparison of a specific job outcome with

the associated value held for that outcome” (Locke, 1976). Female managers would see their job satisfaction level increase if the outcome of the job met their expectations. From a push factor perspective, female managers mainly seek the possibility to associate with people that they respect, the freedom to be themselves at work, and their work to be acknowledged. From a pull factor perspective, they seek the opportunity to be accommodated by their organizations through family-friendly benefits and flexible schedules, and strong support from their spouse at home. If these elements are not put into place, female managers experience a “stall” in their career which due to choice or timing may present a liability to their organization. When it comes to choice, women feel that they are doing their best at their current positions and may not see the need to move on to more responsibilities at a higher rank. As far as timing goes, women who decide to stay within their position may not see the opportunity to move forward yet, and may want to acquire additional skills that can help them in future positions.

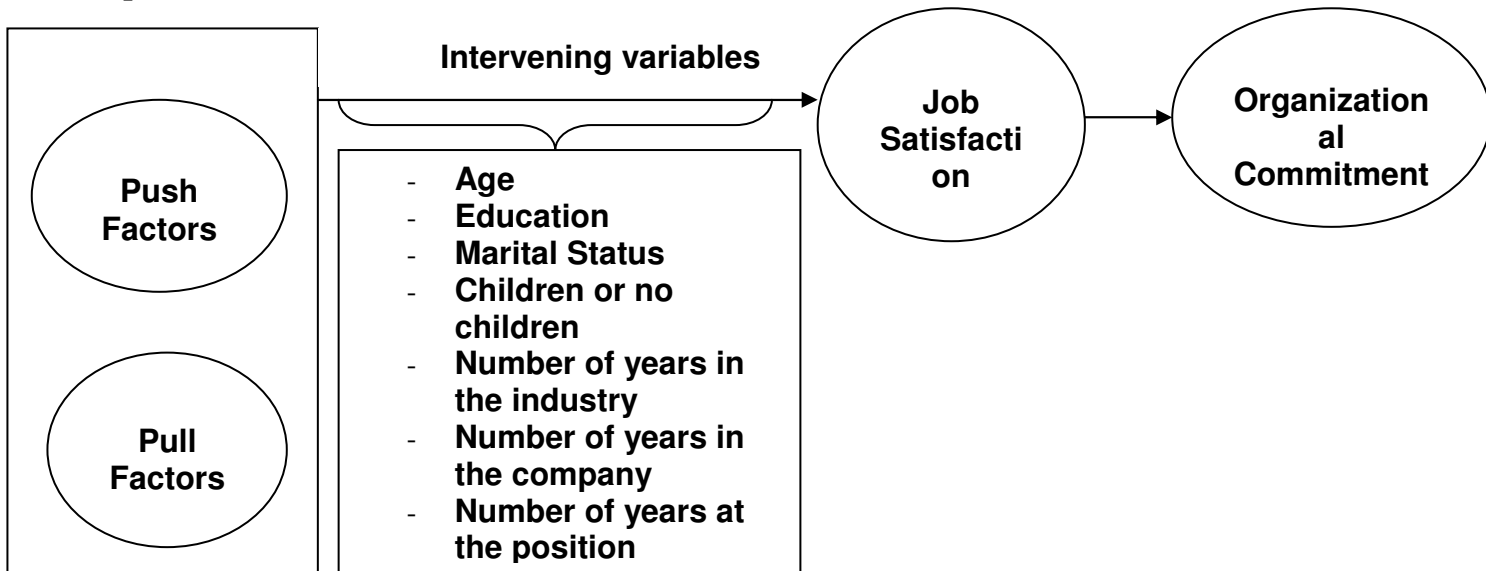
Furthermore, Mason (1995) reveals that women’s basis for employment satisfaction differ from that of men on various levels. Men’s basis involves “agentic” values and behaviors that include self-assertion, self-expansion, or the urge to master. However, women’s basis is placed upon values, attitudes, and behaviors communal in nature. They include selflessness, concern and interaction with others in a supportive and cooperative way, even though the job may be only minimally demanding and challenging. The caring nature of women allows them to identify social relations at work and intrinsic rewards as important aspects of their job, which correlates with higher satisfaction (Bender, Donohue, & Heywood, 2005). In a study conducted by the National Opinion Research at the University of Chicago, based on data collected since 1988 and released in 2007, “the happiest workers appeared to be those whose work gained the intrinsic rewards of helping, caring for, or protecting or teaching others” (Katz, 2007). Therefore, organizations able to provide environments that combine both aspects should anticipate a more positive outcome where a satisfied employee equals a happy employee.

Organizational Commitment

At the end of the continuum of the proposed model is an element most studies usually associate with job satisfaction called organizational commitment which is an important identifier of employees’ intention to go “the extra mile” in their organization. While job satisfaction represents “an individual’s intrinsic career success and satisfaction with his or her progress towards achieving career goals” (Jandeska & Kraimer, 2005), organizational commitment focuses on the employee’s attachment to the organization as a whole, regardless of the position. Organizational commitment is the result of the organizational support employees receive. More precisely, it is “a condition in which an individual identifies with his or her organization and its goals, and wishes to maintain membership in it” (Ghazzawi & Smith, 2009). Particularly for women, organizations that fail to support their advancement face inevitable turnover of qualified and experienced professionals (Jawahar & Hemmasi, 2006). Prior to turnover, withdrawal behaviors and reduced feeling of any obligation to remain loyal to the organization are likely to occur when employees perceive a lack of support. Rosin and Korabik (1991) state women’s decreasing organizational commitment as a potential result of a work environment dominated by male values, biases and controls.

Employees are more likely to display an attitude of attachment in their organization if their perception of the latter is that of a place of work that cares. In the case of most women managers, they have had to adopt male behaviors, such as urge to master, hunger for power and authority, and have not found it to lead to career success (Jandeska & Kraimer, 2005). In addition, the old boys' network mentality, status-leveling concepts and other elements found among the push factors still lingered; women have difficulties being themselves and encounter barriers to advancement that lead them to being less satisfied to their jobs, and in turn less committed to their organizations (Jandeska & Kraimer, 2005)

Proposed Model



Methodology and Results

An electronic survey questionnaire was sent via e-mail to female managers, directors and executives of hospitality organizations in the U.S. It was distributed by two representatives from two hospitality organizations, the Recruiting Director of a lodging organization and the Diversity Manager of a food service organization. Each representative agreed to participate in the recruiting efforts by reaching out to all female managers, directors or executives in their network with the link to the online survey.

All the model constructs were measured by multiple items on a 5-point Likert scale (from 1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree) divided in three sections. First, the Push Factors which were measured by eleven items adopted from previous studies such as “I experience discomfort around my male counterparts”. Second, the Pull Factors were measured by ten items such as “Throughout my career, I have had to choose between my work and my home life”. Third, the Job Satisfaction construct was measured by ten items such as “I feel fulfilled at my job”. Finally, the Organizational Commitment construct was measured by six items such as “I often think of leaving my current employer”. A fifth section of the survey contained an open-ended question asking the participant for her opinion about the steps she would like her organization to take to retain female managers and executives.

Mean scores and frequency were calculated for descriptive purposes, and the Pearson’s correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships between the push factors, pull factors, job satisfaction and organizational commitment constructs. Additionally, ANOVA and T-test were conducted to determine any significant differences on each construct

The study has a response rate of 78%; a total of 195 responses were received out of the 250 surveys that were distributed, 174 of which were usable. Respondents between 30 and 39 years-old were part of the largest group with 34.7% of all responses. The majority of respondents are married (60.7%) and 56.1% reveal that they have children. The majority of respondents possess a 4-year college degree (50.6%). 30.6% of the respondents work in the Events field. Finally, 37.9% of the respondents have between 10 and 19 years of experience in the industry.

Results support all three hypotheses as indicated through the correlation coefficients. The correlation coefficient for the first hypothesis ($r = -.650$) indicates a negative but strong relationship between the Push Factors and Job Satisfaction constructs. The results of the study are consistent with the literature review in which respondents admit to falling victims of stereotypes and consider their workplace as an environment driven by the old boys’ mentality. Several respondents pointed out to the fact that the majority of women hold assistant positions, they are not treated like members of the team and they don’t have access to outside networking opportunities. These results prove that the hospitality industry is also a male-driven industry where women’s advancement to higher positions is delayed.

The correlation coefficient for the second hypothesis ($r = -.291$) indicates a negative, but weak relationship between the Pull Factors and Job Satisfaction. Results show that women in the hospitality industry also have to make the choice between their career and their home life, and

that finding that balance is difficult. Unfortunately, in spite of their need to be able to balance these two aspects of their life, taking time out of work is not always available. In the case that the option is available, results indicate that a strong majority of respondents seem to disagree with the fact that the demands of family distract them from focusing on their work or discourage them from advancing in their career. This comes to show that taking care of family is not a deterrent for women to achieve professional advancement; it is the ability to balance that with work that creates problems. The vast majority of respondents expressed their desire for organizations to provide more flexibility in the hours or more family-friendly options that would allow them to make the right balance between work and home life. The correlation coefficient for the third hypothesis ($r=.736$) indicates a strong positive relationship between the Job Satisfaction and Organizational Commitment. Survey results indicate that women executives in the hospitality industry are not committed to their organization as a result of their low Job Satisfaction. They do not display enough positive regard towards their job that would translate into a similarly positive regard towards their organization. This phenomenon is consistent with previous studies because both constructs go in the same direction. As the job satisfaction level decreases, so does organizational commitment.

The results of this research have demonstrated that women managers in the hospitality industry are not different from women managers in other areas of business when it comes to the push and pull factors. From both perspectives, the overall implications for organizations are significant, whereas women are expressing their intent to leave their current workplace if all they are not given access to the resources that matter to them. If they do not find satisfaction in what they do, it is highly likely that they will not want to stay attached to their current employers. Consequently, if given the choice to leave their employer and have the opportunity to thrive in another environment, they will.

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