A CONCEPTUAL PAPER EXAMINING THE CORRELATION BETWEEN COMMUNICATION SKILLS AND GENDER INEQUALITY ISSUES AMONG WORKING WOMEN IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract: Effective communication skills play a crucial role in the growth and progress of an organisation. In addition to enhancing marketing and administrative efficiency, effective management communication has the potential to enhance the reputation and image of an organisation. Inadequate mastery of communication skills is considered a significant element contributing to the problem of gender disparity in organisations in Malaysia. Gender inequality is a longstanding issue in Malaysia. Throughout history, women have consistently been stigmatised as a vulnerable demographic and have been perceived as lacking interest in governing a nation or participating in a professional organisation. Despite the considerable efforts made by women to demonstrate their competence in the professional sphere, discrimination against this group persists, particularly in administrative concerns. This essay seeks to examine the significance of acquiring proficient communication skills among employed women in Malaysia to address gender disparity in the professional environment. Hence, doing this study is necessary to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the communication abilities that women can cultivate in the professional setting, hence facilitating the reduction of gender disparities.

Keywords: *Communication Skills, Women, Gender, Organization*

INTRODUCTION

The topic of gender inequality has been a subject of ongoing scholarly debate throughout history. Gender studies is a popular subject of scholarly discourse worldwide. The prevalence of gender issues is ubiquitous and has been ingrained as a societal convention and accepted as a standard way of life (Thivyaa & Rani, 2022). Gender inequality is attributed to a range of causes that differ based on the prevailing circumstances. Some of the environmental barriers that have been identified as contributing to gender inequality in the workplace include a lack of immediate appreciation and support from superiors and management, unclear job specifications, poor communication among colleagues, and rigid and non-transparent performance evaluations (Zubaidah Zainal Abidin et al, 2008).

According to Thivyaa and Rani (2022), gender is a significant factor in understanding and predicting behaviour. According to their findings, derived from their research, both males and females are seen to possess the capability to perform identical activities. Despite their varying levels of physical endurance, they are nevertheless capable of performing the same activity.

Moreover, the way the media portrays gender significantly shapes society's understanding of gender roles. The portrayal of gender-specific traits in the media might reinforce societal expectations regarding the appearance and conduct of both males and females (Dorin & Delia, 2015). Gender identity is not inherent, but rather shaped by iterative expressions and performances, ultimately resulting in the formation of a gender identity that prescribes masculinity for males and femininity for women. Contrary to popular belief, women do not inherently possess femininity, and the same applies to men (Thivyaa & Rani, 2022).

The achievement of women in professional fields is becoming a common occurrence. Women who were formerly subjugated and deprived of their rights are currently proactively pursuing gender parity in diverse domains, including education, healthcare, politics, and more. Consistent with the trajectory of national progress, women have now begun to assume significant roles in both governmental institutions and private enterprises. Addressing the gender gap is crucial for achieving equitable community development (Kartina & Dayang, 2019).

Effective communication skills are crucial for personal growth, performance, information acquisition, skill development, training, and organisational advancement within a company (Hashim Fauzy Yaacob, 2011). According to Ivy Deirdre Mangkau (2012), good communication skills necessitate a combination of seriousness, experience, and genuine enthusiasm in one's job or field of involvement. Communication skills encompass interpersonal communication skills, intrapersonal communication skills, and non-verbal communication skills.

SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

Throughout this time, numerous conjectures have been developed regarding the underlying factors contributing to gender imbalance in the workplace. Azlina (2012) states that the rapid development and modernization in Malaysia over the past 50 years since achieving independence have created ample opportunities for scholars and researchers to analyse various societal issues. He stated that the active involvement of women in the national development process has resulted in ramifications and produced several gender concerns in all areas of women's participation. Consequently, this phenomenon has garnered the attention of several scholars, researchers, and national policy makers who engage in debates and discussions through a variety of studies.

This study seeks to elucidate the correlation between proficiency in communication skills and the problem of gender inequality in the workplace, to offer a comprehensive understanding to society. The topic of gender has gained significant importance and has had a profound influence on the country, while also playing a crucial role in shaping policy suggestions, particularly in every development plan (Azlina Abdullah, 2012). The significance of women's contribution to a country's growth lies in their ability to augment the pool of human resources (Asri Selamat, 2009). Therefore, when women make advancements and assume greater responsibilities in the workforce, it is anticipated that they will make valuable contributions to the labour market and consequently enhance the overall state of the national economy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The problem of gender inequality in Malaysia has persisted from its inception, although it was not particularly conspicuous due to the limited representation of women in the workforce and in leadership roles within organisations. In the field of politics, Sabihah Osman (1983) stated in her book that women's involvement in the anti-session movement in Sarawak from 1946 to 1950 was influenced by the historical context of Sarawak, as mentioned in the article "Women's Political Participation in Decision Making in Sarawak, Malaysia" by Nadrawina Monday (2013). This "backwardness" is evident in a situation where women are perceived as being more engaged in domestic activities within the household rather than outside of it.

In the past, women were excluded and disregarded in politics, but this situation has now transformed. Women have started to gain the ability to express themselves and share their viewpoints. This change has been facilitated by the establishment of the Ministry of Women and Community Development, which serves as a platform for women to voice their opinions (Norhuriyatina, 2006). Aminah Ahmad (1999) supports this viewpoint by stating that during the 1950s and 1960s, women primarily pursued careers in agriculture, public administration, and local companies. Nevertheless, women's proficiency in technology, international trade, business, and services has recently been acknowledged.

Bouchier (1984) asserted that individualist-liberals, socialists, and radical feminists have a common perspective, concurring that women have been subjected to inequitable treatment based on their gender. They perceive gender inequality not as an unavoidable outcome of biological factors, but rather as a historical occurrence influenced by specific circumstances and personal encounters. They argue that several overarching institutional, political, economic, and social factors have intertwined to influence the gender-based allocation of work, which has created, justified, and sustained gender disparities in both domestic and professional spheres. Throughout history, various cultures have implemented gender-based role systems that grant men more power and control over resources compared to women. These systems have been influenced by religious beliefs (Ruether, 1981).

Gender disparity is more pronounced in impoverished nations compared to developed ones. Seema Jayachandran (2015) found that men generally earn higher earnings than women in these nations. Gender significantly influences individual behaviour in the workplace. Throughout history, the lack of equal chances and the imbalanced recognition of women in the workplace have significantly impacted female workers. They perceive that their rewards are influenced by other factors and are beyond their personal control.

Kessler-Harris (1982) asserted that historically, women occupied a subordinate position in assisting men with their work. By 1840, a mere 10 percent of women were employed in occupations outside of their homes, mostly in roles like as housemaids or unskilled labourers

in factories. Gender remained a constraint within the social framework throughout the nineteenth century. Kessler-Harris also stated that although women's education has been on the rise, it fails to provide broader work prospects due to the limited focus on household-related skills rather than income-generating abilities.

According to a study conducted by Karima (2012), the work sector involving customer service necessitates direct interaction with clients, making communication skills very desirable and crucial. As a result, women have a higher likelihood of being hired in this industry due to their innate ability to effectively communicate with clients. Women are deemed more apt for employment in the customer service industry. Karima reiterated that women are anticipated to possess proficient communication abilities in the realm of customer service due to gender-related expectations. This confers an advantage upon women in terms of their employability in this profession.

Gender Perspective Integration in Organisations

Women are integral components of the nation's valuable resources that require optimal cultivation to facilitate their active and impactful contributions to the nation's progress. Consequently, one of the primary objectives of the government is to safeguard women's rights and uphold their well-being, thereby ensuring the fulfilment of their life. To prevent the marginalisation of women in national development, it is crucial to prioritise gender concerns. This can be achieved by incorporating a gender perspective in the planning, formulation, and implementation of policies and development programmes. Gender equality is crucial as it ensures that men and women have the same chances to participate in and reap the benefits of economic, social, cultural, and political progress, without facing any hindrances or restrictions (Asri Selamat, 2009).

Nurulainy, Vivien, and Nur Hafizah (2022) argue that to effectively tackle the disparity in gender leadership, organisations should implement concurrent efforts to promote diversity in leadership and nurture the capabilities of young women for future leadership roles. Organisations must possess sufficient resources and capabilities to successfully tackle major issues and adjust to the ever-changing global environment. Organisations must also consider the changing requirements of female millennials, which depend on their specific professional phases. Hence, with the prioritisation of an inclusive culture and the implementation of talent procedures, policies, and programmes, organisations may develop a business model that fosters the success of all individuals, particularly female millennials.

According to Sarah, Stanley, and Robert (1994), both men and women encounter intricate social and organisational predicaments. Based on personal experience, each gender encounters distinct expectations in the workplace, at home, and within the community, which necessitate the investment of time and dedication from each person. Certain individuals lack the ability to develop an effective strategy for dealing with the conflict that often emerges, particularly among women, when they must choose between their work and their family. When an individual is unable to cope with this pressure, they will relinquish responsibilities that they deem unimportant and cease working. However, Lehman (1992) argues that gender domination continues to play a significant role in determining the chances of progressing in a long-term career, and there are still barriers to achieving equality between men and women.

Noor Azizah Ahmad, Mariny Abdul Ghani, and Zalinah Ahmad (2014) state that the National Women's Policy is implemented with the aim of mandating the involvement of various stakeholders to achieve the goal of developing a skilled workforce that can contribute effectively to national development initiatives. The progress of a nation will not occur if only one party is resolute in formulating a comprehensive plan to actively pursue it. The formulation of the National Women's Policy demonstrates the government's resolve to enhance the

participation of women in the progress of the nation in a more efficient, organised, and significant manner (Asri Selamat, 2009).

Moreover, the primary goal of the National Women's Policy is to provide a fair and equal collaboration between men and women in accessing resources and information, as well as in benefiting from opportunities and the overall progress of the nation. Furthermore, the National Women's Policy was established with the aim of incorporating women into all areas of national progress, considering their capabilities and requirements, to enhance living conditions, eliminate poverty and illiteracy, and promote peace and prosperity in the country (Sabitha, 1997)

Communication Paradigm of Women in Organisations

According to a study conducted by Ahmad Jawahir et al (2011), communication is a vital component and serves as the primary driving force in human existence. According to their perspective, it is essential for humans to engage in communication to articulate their viewpoints and emotions to others. Communication is a dynamic process that operates by utilising information. One individual performs an action or utters words, and the other individual reacts or responds based on their comprehension of the actions or words. Human communication is the act of comprehending the world and expressing emotions to others by assigning significance to spoken and non-verbal signals.

Effective communication is an essential aspect of organisational management. Moreover, communication is the act of conveying information, ideas, opinions, and plans across different departments within an organisation. Effective human interactions are unattainable in the absence of communication. Nevertheless, proficient, and efficient communication is vital not only for interpersonal connections but also for establishing a prosperous business. Efficient communication is necessary in all levels and facets of the organisation.

Interpersonal communication frequently takes place at multiple hierarchical levels within an organisation. Effective communication skills are crucial in an organisation to ensure clear and comprehensible message delivery. Each communication should successfully attain the intended impact, with the utmost importance placed on ensuring the message adheres to ethical standards. Communication is the process of exchanging significant information between two or more individuals, with the aim of ensuring that the recipient comprehends the intended message of the sender.

The efficacy of an organization's internal and external communication process is crucial in determining the overall success of a company in the business world. In the intricate realm of human existence, as technology advances, the demand for communication is growing and extends beyond interpersonal connections with friends and family. According to Omardin and Azhar (1990), the paradigm of communication in organisations demonstrates that communication inside organisations takes place in a complex open system environment. This communication is both influenced by and has an influence on the environment.

Human interactions in organisations are crucial as they facilitate the exchange of information among individuals, as well as between individuals and groups or groups themselves (Ahmad Jawahir et al, 2011). The way an individual speaks in their daily life diverges from their communication style in a professional setting. Effective communication with supervisors, colleagues, and personnel is crucial in any industry. Proficient communication skills can enhance your employability, facilitate career advancement, and foster success in your professional endeavours. Every member of the staff, whether in a government or private organisation, engages in interaction and communication with one another to accomplish the mission and objectives of the organisation.

One of the limitations that have been noticed is the limited proficiency of women in mastering communication skills within an organisation. They lack the courage to express their opinions or beliefs on a particular matter. These individuals can be classified as being part of the Spiral of Silence. It is a scenario in which a person refrains from speaking up due to the fear of being marginalised by a more dominating group. This viewpoint is corroborated by Hall (1972), who asserts that individuals have two options: they can either concentrate on enhancing the quality of their personal performance to meet all demands, or they can completely disregard the issue and refrain from attempting to manage their assigned role (reactive behaviour).

Additionally, Hall suggests that individuals could modify their personal attitude towards a specific role. Many gender inequalities in communication styles suggest that women are subordinate to males and should be regarded as inferior to them. This also has ramifications for gender disparities in leadership patterns inside organisations, as women are often perceived as being subordinate to males in this domain. This portrays them as unsuitable for leadership or managerial roles.

This assertion is supported by Karima (2012), where he asserts that the difference in rights, positions, and opportunities between men and women is a result of gender-based variations in communication style, influence strategies, and leadership models. Psychologically, men and women exhibit distinct behavioural patterns, including differences in communication styles and approaches to influencing others. Gender disparities in communication and the use of influence strategies also impact the differences in leadership patterns observed between men and women.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUCION

While women in Malaysia have made significant achievements in diverse domains, it is imperative to enhance their capabilities in the economic, social, and political sectors to assure their well-being, contentment, and gender equality in the workplace, particularly considering global transformations. Malaysian women have seen significant changes in terms of their status, function, and welfare, which has positioned them as a crucial asset in the country's development (Azlina, 2012). Hence, it is plausible that women may eventually attain a superior position, thereby garnering international recognition for their accomplishments and enhancing the reputation of their country.

Academic research on psychological gender differences has demonstrated that women employ communication to enhance social interactions and form connections, whereas men utilise language to assert dominance and attain concrete outcomes (Leaper, 1991; Maltz & Borker, 1982; Wood, 1996; Mason, 1994). The existence of gender variations in communication styles and influence strategies has led to the development of conventional gender roles that impact the behaviour of both men and women in professional settings. The primary distinction between men and women in terms of their communication styles arises from their divergent perspectives on the purpose of conversation.

In addition, Sarah, Stanley, and Robert (1994) argue that the organization's professional attitude also influences how it addresses the problem of gender inequality. This is since all personnel in the organisation are resolute in delivering their utmost performance in their work daily. Every organisation recognises that maintaining a strong professional reputation is crucial for achieving success and avoiding failure. Therefore, they make efforts to retain their most skilled and experienced employees. It is important to maintain a high level of professionalism in corporate communication to establish communication partnerships based on certification and high credentials. Professional women should adhere to professional ethics to uphold their social status and prominence.

Overall, while prior research has identified multiple variables contributing to gender inequality in the workplace, it is crucial to address the lack of proficiency in communication skills and its influence on this issue specifically in Malaysia. According to Ahmad Jawahir et al (2011), the quality of an organisaton is directly linked to the efficiency of its communication process. Women are sometimes perceived as hesitant to express their thoughts and assert their rights through appropriate methods. Female participation in trade unions is infrequent, resulting in a lack of representation for women's concerns that should be addressed and advocated for inside trade unions. Furthermore, it is necessary to enhance the organization's training modules, workshops, and communication skills courses to address any deficiencies and enhance efficient workplace communication. The purpose of this is to enhance women's bravery in expressing their viewpoints and to further refine their communication abilities, particularly in professional settings.

Furthermore, it is imperative to delve deeper into the importance of communication skills in addressing the issue of gender inequality to completely eradicate this problem in the future. Hence, it is imperative for women to acquire suitable expertise and understanding to enhance their competitiveness and effectively confront the obstacles posed by globalisation. Communication is regarded as a crucial factor in enhancing the efficiency of an organisation. It is via efficient communication that individuals may be integrated into work groups, and the success of an organisation is contingent upon the quality of communication employed (Timm & De Tienne, 1995).

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