

DOCTORAL THESIS

Women as strategic resource and organization performance: a perspective of resource synergy

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ABSTRACT

This thesis develops a new theoretical perspective (i.e., the resource synergy perspective) to explain how women in the workforce may help improve organization performance. Drawing upon this theoretical perspective, I study how women, as an important strategic human resource, can be better utilized with the resource synergy generated between women resources and certain synergy-relevant variables. Among the synergy-relevant variables, this perspective highlights the importance of organization strategy and leadership, because these two variables are developed based on organizational resources and should be contingent on the environmental and situational factors that are partly uncontrollable by an organization. In addition, the roles of organization culture as a type of environmental factor and task characteristics as a situational factor are also considered.

To realize the research goals, I conduct two studies at different levels. In study 1, I propose that organizations can take advantage of women resources by increasing the proportion of women in the employees at the macro level. Moreover, I propose that organization strategy, culture, and task characteristic have coordinative and supportive effects on the increase of the proportion of women, leading to the generation of resource synergy. Specifically, I seek to prove that, with the coordination and coherence of these synergy-relevant variables (i.e., customer-oriented strategy), the culture of collectivism, and task complexity, women's resources can be better utilized. Thus, the generated synergy can bring greater competitive advantages for organizations and thus lead to higher organization financial performance.

In study 2, I proceed to suggest that making full use of women resource at the micro level is also important. The resource synergy perspective provides a new explanation for the roles of inequality and leadership in the utilization of women resources in organizations. This study proposes that women's inequality perceptions have negative effects on their performance in organizations, thus preventing organizations from making full use of its important strategic resources and generating synergy. With these damaging effects, it is difficult for an organization to make full use of women resources and achieve competitive advantages. However, with a high level of leader-member exchange (LMX), which indicates high quality in leader-member relationships, female employees may still have the motivation to perform well. Thus, the negative effects of inequality can be attenuated and women resources can be better utilized with the synergistic effects of LMX.

To test the above hypotheses, I conduct two empirical studies in China. The sample of study 1 includes 132 organizations from the service industry. Results of the hierarchical regression analysis support the positive effects of increasing the proportion of women on the organization's return on assets (ROA) but fail to support its positive relationship with market growth. The results also reveal that organization synergy-relevant variables such as customer-oriented strategy, the culture of collectivism, and task complexity do generate synergy with women resources. In other words, with the existence of these variables, the positive effects of the proportion of women on ROA and market growth are both enhanced.

Study 2, which is conducted in organizations from four industries in China (i.e., chemistry, electronic, manufacturing, and hospitality), consists of 190 female employees and 51 matched leaders. Results of the hierarchical regression analysis show that organization inequality is negatively related to women's job-related performance and positively relates to their turnover intentions. In addition, LMX is found to positively moderate the effects of inequality on women's job-related performance and negatively moderates the effects on their turnover intentions.

At the end of this thesis, the research's theoretical and managerial implications are discussed. This thesis makes six contributions to the literature: 1) It is among the first to specify that women are a type of strategic resource for organizations and provide systematic investigations on how to make full use of this resource. 2) This research deepens the understanding of women as a type of resources by identifying certain boundary conditions; i.e., the synergy-relevant variables. 3) This research develops a new perspective (i.e., the resource synergy perspective) to study the utilization of women as a strategic resource for organizations at multi levels. 4) This research should extend the literature of culture by identifying the role of collectivism in making use of women as a resource. 5) This research can also add to the literature of leadership by examining the role of LMX in making use of women resources. 6) This research provides a new theoretical perspective for the relationship between employees' inequality perceptions and their job performance.

In addition to the theoretical implications, this research also provides useful knowledge for the management in organizations. First, based on the research findings, organizations should provide equal opportunity in employment for women and include more women in the workforce. Second, it is also critical to retain the existing female workforce through better talent management, thereby providing a work environment supporting the utilization of women resources. Based on the synergy relevant variables examined in this research, organizations should pay attention to their strategy, culture and task characteristics. It is important for organizations to consider about whether their culture supports the utilization of women resources or not. By the culture of high collectivism, organizations can provide a favorable work environment where women are more likely to be accepted and respected. Moreover, a strategy of customer orientation is beneficial for women resource to be deployed fully. Also organization should pay attention to place women in appropriate tasks. Third, this research highlights the importance of women's individual performance in realizing their value in organizations. It is vital for organizations and managers to improve women's equality perceptions within organizations. Moreover, managers and organizations should take measures to enhance the quality of leader-subordinate exchange relationship.

Moreover, the strength and limitations of this research are also discussed. The research has several strengths. First, this research is theory-driven. Second, I conduct two empirical studies at multi-levels to address the issue of making full use of women in organizations. Third, the sample size is large in both studies (study 1, 132 organizations; study 2, 190 female employees and 51 matched leaders). Fourth, the threat of common method bias is further minimized because I collect the data of study 2 from both employees and their immediate supervisors. Fifth, I adopted the appropriate approaches to analyze the data and test the hypotheses.

Finally, I try to suggest possible directions for future research on the utilization of women resources in organizations.

Keywords: utilization of women resources, the proportion of women, inequality, resource synergy, performance

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