Working Women's Perceptions of Career Competencies: A Review of Existing Literature

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Abstract: The paper focuses on the interpretation and analysis of the existing studies and viewpoints with regard to the mid career women's harnessed perceptions with regard to the influences on the vocational and organizational career competencies. The internal perceptions and external organizational support has been observed to shape the women's perceptions yet the literature varies substantially with regard to the pattern and context of such an impact. The paper relies on the literature review methodology to analyze and understand the phenomenon. The paper is divided into six sections. The first section introduces the background and the literature with regard to the mid career women and her consistent career aspirations across mid life stage. The next section elaborates on the working women in the mid career phase. The third section focuses on the theoretical conceptualization of the career competencies. The fourth section concentrates on the contexts that shape the perceptions across working women. The next section discusses the role of the internally perceived and internally harnessed perceptions with regard to ageing, self efficacies and occupational expertise. The following section elaborates on the external support mechanism in shaping the acquisition of the career related competencies. The last section summarizes the observations vis a vis the women's self management and organizational support for career development and resource acquisition.

Keywords: Mid-Career, Career Aspirations, Contextual Influences, Working Women, Organizational Support.

I. INTRODUCTION

The mid career "working women" and their "career aspirations" has long remained a matter of intense debate and analysis across the emerging and developed economies. The two terms are often been viewed as standing for a phenomenon that has never ever been devoid of the "contextual" and "social" influences across the ages. The phenomenon is being operational across developing and developed economies alike. This paper illustrates and seeks to understand the Indian working women in her mid career and her respective perceptions with regard to the acquisition, development, retention and nurturing of the career competencies. The theoretical context of "career competencies" is being discussed and the contextual determinants of the women based career competencies is being analyzed with aid of existing literature, frameworks and practices. The paper is significant in terms that the mid career working women's perceptions and their basis have hardly ever been explored appropriately.

II. UNDERSTANDING WORKING WOMEN IN MID CAREER

The term "working women" in their "middle career" stand for diverse interpretations and meanings. Some studies regard the situation as a crisis one involving the imbalances and inappropriate proportions of the competencies and abilities. The much published term "mid-life crisis" is widely believed to be an outcome of social influences on the women's career across time and space. This phenomenon has occasionally been defined as those middle years in the women's lives span that range from the thirties to forties (1). Hall's model on the women's "mid-career crisis" illustrates the significance of the changes in learning orientation across the career progression. Another research across the professional women's mid-career satisfaction (2) regarded the phenomenon as comprising the individual characteristics, career characteristics, organizational characteristics and specific success factors as having a definite impact on the women's mid-career satisfaction across the American economy. SLAY (2004) interpreted the working women's career identity as possessing significant implications for the women's repetitive career review across the time. The study envisioned the women's career identity and the women's career shocks as the two vital predictors of the inclination for career review, which was observed to possess implications for the women's sense of decision making with regard to choosing a course of action suitable as per the options available to her in mid-career stage of life.

III. CONCEPTUALIZING WOMEN'S CAREER COMPETENCIES

The "career competencies" are those aspects of profession or life progression that are vital to survive, succeed and sustain the growth of career across certain and uncertain times. The concept has been reviewed and viewed in terms of the vocational and organizational career resource and self improvement and self preparation perspective. The Hirschi's career resource framework encompasses four types of career resources or competencies that are widely regarded as essential to succeed in organizational

hierarchy. The framework classifies the resources as the human capital resources (skills, and abilities), social capital resources (resources that are embedded across social networks, organizational support), psychological resources as well as the career identity resources. The framework essentially combines the internal and external dimensions of the career resource acquisition and accumulation across vocational and organizational perspective. The existing literature explores two distinct contexts of internal and external aspect s of career resource and career competency development.

The term "career competencies" has been observed to involve the vocational or organizational knowledge, skills and abilities that are central to career progress and which are equally influenced by the individual himself as well as the external environment (3) in which the individual is working. The concept has been conceptualized as involving the aspects of "reflective" career competencies, "communicative" career competencies, "behavioral" career competencies whereby the individual and the external organizational support plays a crucial role in acquisition as well as accumulation.

The existing literature elaborates on the perceptions of working woman with regard to the job demands-resource model (4). The model suggests the crucial impact of the individual's personal resources in evaluation of one's respective abilities to control and impact upon the environment consistently. In a study on development of taxonomy of career competencies for professional women, Hackett observed the incidence of the communication skills, interpersonal skills, political skills, organizational skills, career planning and management skills, career advancement skills, job advancement skills and the adaptive cognitive skills. Andrew's conceptualization indentified human capital resources, environmental resources, motivational resources and career management behaviors as crucial to the attainment and sustenance of the career competencies. The study oprationalized the constructs with aid of occupational expertise, job market knowledge, soft skills, career opportunities, organizational career support, job challenge, social career support, career involvement, career confidence, career clarity, networking, career exploration,

IV.　CONTEXTS THAT SHAPE PERCEPTIONS

The career across the working women could be understood as involving the social space within which an individual's (working women in this case) career could be mapped and analyzed. The careers are regarded as dynamic and temporal in nature as the situations, the age and the requirements of the employer change over the periods of time. The existing studies (5) interpret the career as an outcome of three perspectives- condition, boundary and the

time. These three constructs collectively impact the overall dynamics and the utility of the working women's career in particular.

The ownership and control of women's careers has traditionally been observed as external rather than been internal in nature (2). A host of academic studies vindicate the relevance of the external control of women's careers (6) on account of parent's earlier socialization and education based institutionalization of primitive thinking about the future work lives and the possible roles of obedient wife and motherhood (7). The decision making stimulus and the dominant influences on the career patterns have traditionally been external rather than internal in nature (8). The review of existing literature points towards varied differences in career development across the genders. Astin in a study across working women emphasized the crucial role of four constructs in shaping the career trajectories across the women professionals.

The study regarded the work motivation, work expectations sex role socialization, structure of opportunity as influenced by the prevalent sex-role stereotyping, distribution of jobs and subsequent discrimination at place of work (9). Hence it can be inferred that women in mid career are equally conscious with regard to career perusal and devotion to organizational excellence. The competency based model (10) insist the central role of the skills (cooperation, organization of work, goal orientation, innovativeness, risk taking, pro-activeness) in positioning across the organizations. The women professional's career transition (11) has indeed been observed to be complex and never ever free from the internal and external contextual elements, impacts and challenges.

The women's career competencies have been observed as prime determinants of their respective abilities to compete and succeed at work place (12) in comparison with male counter parts. The study across 305 mid age women revealed the incidence of the positive relationship between the job resources and work related engagement of women. The women's career competencies were observed to possess a mediating role in relationship across job resources and the work based engagement.

The women's fit across the transformed organizational work environment has long remained a construct that has been explored across the multiple dimensions and contexts. Another study regarded the women's fit across the prevailing organizational environment as detrimental for women's successful career change (8). The study compared the two distinct perspectives - traditional and contemporary; and observed the respective influences on the mid-career women's career change intentions as an outcome of disfigured person-environment fit.

A study (13) interpreted the linkages between the women's preparation for competency development, women's employability and respective women's career success across a period of time. The study across the Belgian financial institutions developed a model to identify the lateral relations across the employee's rate of participation in competency development initiatives, employee's perceived support for competency development, employee's perception of improvement in employability, career related sense of satisfaction and change in employee's sense of employability and marketability (13). The study was conducted across 561 mid-career employees and concluded that the mid-career women's participation in competency development initiatives and presence of perceived support for the women's competency development did enhance the rate of employability and marketability across working women employees. The women's employability was interpreted as playing a mediating role in the relationship between the perceived support for career related competency development and women's long term career succession.

V.   ROLE OF INTERNAL INFLUENCES: SELF MANAGEMENT

The working women are not devoid of internal influences on the pattern and scope of career competency acquisition in organizational and vocational perspective. The self determined and pre conceived opinions with regard to the self assessed self efficacies and organizational occupational expertise figure as the most potential determinants. The "self management" of career as a method and mean has its roots in the meta analytical model of career development where the individual himself is held accountable for the competency acquisition, harnessing as well as application in real time vocational and organizational set up.

The review of existing academic literature points towards the evolving role of individual's perceived efficacies in shaping the content and context of career related decisions (14). In a research across male and female college students, Hackett observed that the perceived efficacy beliefs do shape the career choices of male and female students. In other words, the individual's self -efficacy has largely contributed towards widening the academic understanding of women's career concerns.

Bandura(1977) stressed the critical role of individual's (women in this case) self-efficacy beliefs in deciding the activities they participate in , the quantum of effort undertaken as well as the individual's intention to continue or leave mid-way. In terms of evolving women's career aspirations, the women's self-efficacy beliefs could be regarded as self-choices or intrinsic perceptions (15).

Machida, Feltz(2013) in a research across sportswomen, observed that the women possess the infinite ability to lead more effectively in comparison with male counterparts yet in pressing conditions they are the ones who give up early. The conditioned low self-efficacy levels might be the reason behind the women's rampant inability to achieve top leadership positions in sports, business and society. The study (16) further highlighted the impacts of women's lower confidence on their respective motivation levels, intentions and ongoing actions.

Weiss, Freund (2012) in a study across high school male and female students, observed that the women's ability to cope with uncertainty decreases substantially across the segment that is low in openness. The study further concluded that the women's endorsement of traditional gender role beliefs contributed to self-efficacy and subjective well-being across the section of women low in openness (17).

The studies on "women's motivations to continue work" have rather been selective and domain specific. KOOIJ, Lange, Dikkers (n.d.) differentiated the age as the chronological age, functional age, psychological age, organizational age, life span age. The study across the older workers and their motivations to remain active, observed the incidence of the negative impact of the growing age on the respective person's ability to sustain in current work position and across the life time (18).

Zacher, Yang (2016) argued that the existing research on the aging has always neglected the organizational contexts as the crucial determinant of mid-career women's intention to stay or leave the current employer. The study across 649 employees working in the 120 organizations examined the respondents across the constructs of organizational tenure, individual's perceptions, psychological and organizational age and the discrimination climate. The study (19) observed the incidence of negative relationship between the employee age and the focus on opportunities.

The review of existing literature points towards the rising tendency of self-managed career trajectories; in contrast to organizational management of employee's career cycles. This in other words means the need for consistent internal propensity to learn and re-skill.

A host of studies advocate the individual's own responsibility for consistent and proactive career development across the life time. Some studies have been prominent advocates of supremacy of individual's roles in career development. Some studies attribute the organizational uncertainty to business environment relate turbulence and suggests the primary role of the women in self-management of career across mid-career stage of working age.

Ferguson, Carlson (2015) studied the dual career couples with regard to the role of the work related spousal support on the work family balance and subsequent outcomes for both the wife and the spouse. The study concluded that the work related spousal support contributes to the work family balance and often lead to substantial improvements in the overall family satisfaction and job satisfaction (20). The existing literature highlights the crucial role of the internal competencies and individual's self driven internal passion in development and nurturing of the career resources.

The working women's internal and self driven approach has been observed as contributing substantially to the phenomenon of career competency development. A study on the individual determinants of women's employability highlighted the women's perceptions of support and extent of women's participation in competency development (13); as most effective in shaping her skill based marketability and sense of career satisfaction. Another research (21) attributed the emphasis on the women's self management ability with regard to the career competency acquisition. The development of career based meta competencies (22).

VI.   ROLE OF EXTERNAL INFLUENCES: ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT, PEER INFLUENCES AND SUPERVISOR SUPPORT

The existing literature on the individual's respective indulgence and perceived organizational support in self-competency development and seeking career success has rather been dismal and fragmented in nature. The scarcity of literature on the working women's development of essential career skills highlights the plight of the problem been encountered across the mid-career working women especially in the developing economies of the world. Organizational support to career competency acquisition is not new rather owes a history of organized and institutionalized approaches towards selective and strategic inculcation of the job and career based skills and competencies in the periodic manner across the various hierarchies and levels of organization.

Ming (2016) examined the inter linkages between the organizational rewards, career development opportunities, extent of supervisory support and the internal promotion as comprising the women's perceived organizational support and its impact on the turnover intentions. The study pointed towards the incidence of the positive relations across these constituent variables across the global organizations. The women's perception of organizational support (23) has rather been explored as a construct that focuses more on the women's perception of their contribution across the organization and the resultant outcomes in terms of reduced absenteeism (24).

ISMAIL, Adnan, Bakar (2014) regarded the working women's perception with regard to career enrichment as essential for consistency in her career. The study across the Malaysian higher educational institutions revealed the positive relationship between the women's participation in work place career programs, perceived organizational career development support and the positive outcomes in form of job related satisfaction. The path model confirmed the relationship between the career planning and women's career management and observed a positive correlation with the job satisfaction (25).

The study also confirmed the prevalence of the positive relationship between the perceived career development support and women's job related sense of satisfaction. In a nutshell the findings pointed towards the significant mediating role of the employee's perceived career development support in the relationship between the workplace career programs and respective employee's resultant sense of job related satisfaction in long terms dimension. The rising inclination of the women in economic decision making and co working with men across economic institutions and economic systems has never ever been viewed as something natural yet always viewed from the lens of gender, perceived images of women as well as the concerns with regard to working women's ability to manage work along with family.

A research study across the mid-career primary school teachers (26) devised the crucial role of the stages and plateaus with regard to opportunity identification and support marshaling across the phases of life. Yet one thing is sure that their awareness and inclinations with regard to career perusal have been reported to be stronger than the men.

VII.   CONCLUSIONS

Women across the academic literature have traditionally been viewed as either been home oriented, work centered or both (1). The career related aspirations across the women in global perspective has remained a matter of intense debate and review across the industrial revolution and in the post globalization phase of global history (27). The mid career women's perceptions with regard to acquisition and leverage of the much prized "career competencies" need a fresh review and analysis in view of the rising inclination of the women to pursue career across the life time. The women's fit across the transformed organizational work environment is still a construct that has been explored across the multiple dimensions and contexts and need subsequent research attention.

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