A Review Of The Relationship Between Cultural Beliefs, Stereotypes And Executive Selection Outcome

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This paper is a critical literature review of the relationships between cultural beliefs, stereotypes and executive selection outcome. Culture refers to the values, beliefs and codes of practice that make a community. Organizational culture represent and constituent of the larger societal culture. Employees bring along with them elements of their environmental culture into the organization. The societal cultures influence the perceptions, beliefs and values of employees and find their way in the decision making process, including executive selection decisions. It is for this reason that studies of organizational culture must be done within the context of the larger society in which it operates. This paper identifies the study of the relationship between cultural beliefs, stereotypes and executive selection outcome as an existing gap in understanding social influences in executive selection outcome.

Key Words: *Cultural beliefs, executive, selection, outcome, stereotypes, relationship*

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Introduction

Every community has a unique cultural identity that sets it apart from other communities (Osland and Bird, (2000). Studies on organizational cultures, thus need to be done within the wider framework of norms and values of the country in which the organization operates and how it is affected by the personal values, beliefs and attitudes, that employees bring with them to the work place. Fombrum (1984), cited in Buchanan and Huczynski (2010) saw organizational culture as being partly the outcome of societal factors. Laurent (1989), argued that the national culture was more powerful and stable than organizational culture.

This paper became of specific interest to me as a result of various high level executive appointments back in 2011. Of particular interest is the appointment of the current IMF boss after the resignation of Dominique Strauss-Khan. Soon after her appointment, the International NGOs released scathing criticism of the selection process. According to the writer, the IMF, while attempting to meet commitments for an open, transparent, and merit-based selection process, the board's procedure fell short of their own previous agreements.

Campbell et al (1992) studied the selection of top executives in organizations. Their study was limited to systems, tools and methods used in executive selection. None of the existing studies, however, have

specifically looked at the relationship between cultural attitudes, gender and ethnic stereotypes on executive selection practices.

Theoretical Foundation

The main theoretical foundation of this study is the theory of social learning. This theory, states that social behaviour is learned primarily by observing and imitating the actions of others. According to this theory, social behaviour is also influenced, by being rewarded and/or punished for various actions. It was first put forward by he theory by Miller and Dollard(1941) and later broadened by Bandura and Walters(1963) with the principles of observational learning and vicarious reinforcement. Bandura(1997) further provided the concept of self-efficacy, and refuted the traditional learning theory for understanding learning. The theory deals with cognitive and emotional and aspects of behavioural change and provides ways for new behavioral research.

Social Influence on the other hand occurs when one's emotions, opinions, or behaviours are affected by others. The theory was advanced by Kelman(1958) and explains how people acquire and maintain certain behavioural patterns, while also providing the basis for intervention strategies. A closely related theory of planned behaviour by Ajzen's (1991), was developed from (Bandura's,1957), links attitudes and behaviour. It has been applied to studies of the relationship between beliefs, attitudes, behavioural intentions and behaviours

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in various fields such as advertising, public relations, advertising campaigns and healthcare.

Cultural Beliefs And Stereotypes

Stereotypes have been used to simplify the social world; since they reduce the amount of processing that people do when they meet a new person. By stereotyping we infer that a person has a whole range of characteristics and abilities that we assume all members of that group have or do not have. Stereotypes lead to social categorization, which lead to prejudiced attitudes, which leads to in-groups and "out-groups". Most stereotypes tend to convey a negative impression. Positive examples of stereotypes include judges, who are often perceived to be sober, hence the phrase "sober as a judge". Such a phrase suggests this is a stereotype with a very respectable set of characteristics.

Stereotypes And Executive Selection Outcome

Stereotypes are more ambivalent than typically considered. Takeda et al(2006) in their study on hair colour stereotyping and CEO selection in the United Kingdom, found that blondes were underrepresented in corporate leadership positions in U.K. Thus stereotyping blondes as incompetent affects their status in society particularly in the work place and in leadership positions. Bargh(1999), showed that stereotyping is unconscious and moving its awareness to selection instruments like job screening forms could help counter such seemingly discriminatory actions

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and minimize its effects in executive selection.

According to Gupta (1992) meritocracy is a social concept in which a candidate's success on a job depends primarily on their knowledge, skills, experience, talents, abilities, track record and effort. Selection based on merit and non-discrimination dictates that all differences, including ethnicity, gender and social class, be ignored. If the concept of meritocracy was strictly adhered to, then it would be assumed that social inequality results from unequal merit rather than prejudice or discrimination, however this is not always so in practice.

Cultural Beliefs, Stereotypes And Executive Selection Outcome

Hofstede (1998) introduced four dimensions of national culture that can be used to describe cultural differences and guide organizations to make sense of cultural diversity. These dimensions include, individualism- collectivism, power distance, uncertainty- avoidance and masculinity-femininity. These dimensions have been replicated in other studies like (Smith et al, 2001). Some attempts have been made to integrate macro level and micro level research into so called meso-theories (House et al,1995). Some meso-theorists like Kanungo and Jaeger (1990) argued that socio-cultural variables such as individualism-collectivism and power distance influence internal work culture, which in turn influence Human Resource Practices such as work design, performance management and reward system.

Based on the research of Hofstede (1980), there are differences between national and organizational cultures. For global companies, it is important to understand both in order to impact organizational performance. Hofstede (1980) discussed "Integrating Corporate Practices and National Cultural Values." The topic is highly relevant to organizations operating in a volatile global economic environment.

Cultural Beliefs, Ethnic Stereotypes And Executive Selection

Research has shown that national culture does have an effect on corporate culture. Some values and norms that are found in the national culture do apply at corporate level. An example of this was demonstrated when a Human Resources Manager from a global pharmaceutical company encountered a major challenge in China, Korea and Taiwan, she found it difficult to persuade managers in these countries to accept promotions. Among other things, their values were such that they did not wish to compete with their peers for career rewards (Ross, 2000). This means that national culture also has an impact on Human Resources practices. There is need for Human Resources practitioners to study the culture of the countries they are dealing with in order to develop policies that will increase the performance and productivity of the employees. In this particular case, since these managers refuse to compete against each other for career rewards, Human Resource practitioners need to think of other ways to motivate these employees to increase their performance.

Not all people in organizations value diversity. As a general rule, people are most comfortable with those like themselves and emphasizing diversity may undermine that comfort level (Deitch et.al, 2003). Diversity tends to breed new approaches to old practices and long standing problems. Individuals in organizations may find such change troubling. Moreover, individuals with strong prejudices against certain groups may find rapidly changing demographics in the work force threatening either because they find change itself disquieting, or because they hold a position they feel they might not be able to maintain if groups historically excluded from their work place are allowed to compete in an unhindered way for their positions.

Since workplace discrimination could be manifested in unfair or discriminatory treatment that is not necessarily reflected in wages, many instances of discrimination may be missed when studying objective discrimination (Dion, 1989). Examining individuals' perceptions allows us to explore the subjective side of discrimination, whether perceptions accurately reflect discriminatory treatment it is difficult to determine. However, perceptions do characterize reality for individuals who report it and therefore have real consequences for workers and employers.

Cultural Beliefs, Gender Stereotypes And Executive Selection

Studies have shown low number of women on boards, which is in part, a symptom of insufficient numbers emerging at the top of the management structure and the under-representation of women in senior management generally. Vinnicombe (2010) conducted a study at Cranfield School of Management and found that female representation is low amongst executive board members. 101 Global survey of 2010 reports that UK alone will need an additional five million highly qualified workers within the next ten years to compete globally. The study found that, the relatively low number of successful female role models often compounds stereotypes and reinforces perceived difficulties in rising up the corporate ladder.

Summary, Conceptual Framework And Conclusion

As organizations build an executive talent pool, they are constantly making decisions of who comes through the front door of the organization and who gets promoted (Friedman, 1986). Experience has shown that executive selection and appointment decisions are influenced cultural lenses and stereotypes held by the decision makers. Work place stereotyping manifests in unfair or discriminatory treatment such as selection, promotion and wages. Stereotypes have been known to be unconscious habits of thought, that link personal attributes to group membership (Reskin, 2000). When others conform to established stereotypes, it is likely to be attributed inherent ability or disability.

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The concept of organizational culture has been popular since early 1980s. It was first adopted by senior managers and consultants as a quick fix to virtually every organizational problem. It was later adopted by academicians as a framework with which to understand behavior in organizations (Morgans et al, 1983). Cunliffe (2008) states that organizational culture is important as it shapes the image of the organization, it influences organizational performance, provides direction for the company and helps attract and retain high quality staff. There is contentious view that management can consciously manipulate culture to achieve organizational change objectives (Ogbomnna and Hariis, 2002). Discussions on organizational culture can be traced back some contributors including Ouchi's (1981) Theory Z, Parcale and Athos' (1982), Tom Peters' In Search of Excellence and Deal and Kennedys' (1982). Japan's Industrial success in the 1970s and 80s was attributed to the view that intangible factors such as values and beliefs impacted on financial results. Edgar Schein (1984) was among the first academicians to investigate the concept of culture. Existing research has focused attention to the meanings and beliefs that employees assign to organizational behavior and how these meanings influenced the ways they behaved (Schutz,1995).

Kotter and Heskett (1992), researched the relationship between culture and company's economic success. They empirically tested the cultural strength of 207 large firms from a variety of

industries. They found a moderate correlation and discovered examples of successful weak culture companies and unsuccessful strong culture ones. They concluded that there is evidence of a relationship between strong culture and organizational success. Research by Lubtkin et al. (1998) suggests that organizational culture does not erase national culture. Both managers bring their cultural background, beliefs, values and ethnicity to the work place. Laurent (1983), found more pronounced cultural differences among those working for companies in their native lands. Adler (2002) suggested that the pressure to conform to the culture of a foreign owned company brought out employees' resistance, causing them to cling more strongly to their own national identities.

Osland and Bird (2000), drew attention on cultural paradoxes in their book In Beyond Sophisticated Stereotyping. Their work provided a dialogue that provided people working cross cultural environments with a more useful framework to understand culture. They believe that stereotypes can also be useful, as long as we understand and acknowledge their limitations. Osland

and Bird (2000), noted that some people do not always conform to the cultural stereotypes assigned them, hence it is important for foreigners to understand the cultural context in order to more accurately interpret a behavior. Bargh (1999), found that stereotypes are not under any motivational control, but they are the result of unconscious action. Glick (1999) challenged the long standing assumption that stereotypes were largely role based, grounded in historical roles and embedded in the human psyche. He showed that moving the awareness of stereotypes to selection instruments could help counter discriminatory actions and minimize its effects in executive selection.

Conceptual Model.

The conceptual model below shows the linkage between cultural beliefs, stereotypes and executive selection outcome. In the model, cultural beliefs is the independent variable, while stereotypes are the intervening variable and executive selection outcome is the dependant variable as represented in the conceptual model below.
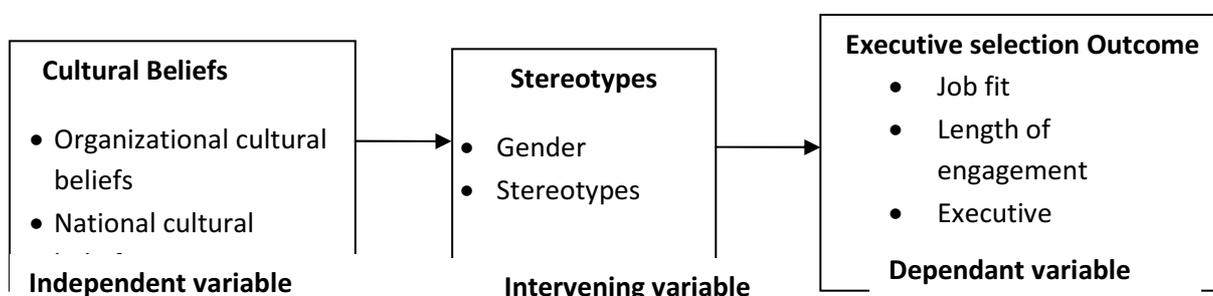

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Knowledge Gap

There are several studies that have been carried on Executive Selection and the impact of national cultures on organizational culture respectively. An example of such research was conducted by Campbel et al (1992), who studied the selection of top three levels (CEO and Two levels below), with the aim of improving the quality of leadership in organizations. They were motivated by concerns of CEO and leadership succession in organizations, their study was limited to systems, tools and methods used in executive selection. However none of the existing studies have specifically looked at the influence of culture and stereotypes on executive selection outcome. There is therefore a contextual and conceptual knowledge gap that was eventually addresses by the writer in her PhD thesis.

Implication of the study

A closer look at the executive selection criteria of organizations reveal some interesting trends that this study expects to bring out. This study is expected close the gap between application of policy and actual practise, with specific reference to executive selection outcome. Organizations operate in culturally diverse environments and the study is expected to bring out the influence of cultural beliefs and stereotypes, that influence executive selection outcome. By knowing how cultural beliefs influence selection outcome, organizations can manipulate these factors to enhance the quality of executives selected.

Conclusion

Executive selection is a highly subjective process, and gets even more complex when considered from a cultural and gender perspective. Globalization of today's organization adds an additional complexity and risk to the process. It has been established that organization approach executive selection through a cultural lens. Cultural lens is the filter through which people view situations and hence make decisions and may vary by gender and ethnic orientation. The more diverse the cultures the more complex the situation.

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