WOMEN’S CAREER SUCCESS IN A MAN’S WORKPLACE – A CROSS-NATIONAL STUDY

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Abstract
Emotional intelligence, psychological gender, work engagement, and masculinity of the national culture as predictors of women’s experienced success in a male work environment are analyzed. Bank employees in Poland (N=39), Romania (N=48) and Austria (N=65) participated in this cross-national study. Work engagement and emotional intelligence were significantly related to experienced success. A significant relationship was also found between masculine psychological gender and success irrespective of biological sex. Masculine women also declared higher levels of success in their banking careers than feminine women. Women from countries differing in masculinity of their natural culture manifested different levels of career success and Romanian women declared the highest level of success. Both psychological gender and culture may be considered as determinants of career success.

Cuvinte cheie: succesul in cariera, variabila gen, cultura națională, inteligența emoțională

Keywords: career success, psychological gender, national culture, emotional intelligence

1. INTRODUCTION
Female employment has increased throughout the European Union within the last decade and 45% of the employed population are now women but there is still considerable between-sex occupational and sector segregation. Women are over-represented in education and health care (70% of all employees) and almost completely absent in heavy industry, building and construction or finance (Mind the gap – Women’s and men’s quality of work and employment, 2008; Report on equality between women and men, 2009). Women’s employment is also
accompanied by other negative social phenomena (Farrell, 2005), such as barriers preventing career advancement (e.g. the "glass ceiling effect"; Cotter et al., 2001) or sexism when the female sex is inconsistent with specific job expectations (Unger & Saundra, 1993). It has also been observed that when women enter prestigious and typically male-dominated professions, the prestige of the professions and wages decrease (Pratto, 1996). Although men and women do not differ in their definitions of career success (Mahdavi, 2009), it can easily be inferred from the foregoing findings that if women are to succeed in a male environment they must have several specific qualities in addition to the one’s traditionally associated with career success, e.g. self-efficacy (Baum, Frese & Baron, 2006), intelligence (Furnham, 2008) or work engagement (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003). A male work environment is defined as: 1) occupations or sectors where men are over-represented and which are therefore associated with masculinity (Brannon, 2008); 2) specific work places where there is professional segregation and where the higher the organizational level, the greater the segregation (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2007). In both cases banks are a typically male work environment. Ironically, even though the target clientele of microfinance is largely feminine, the microfinance sector is defeminising in its leadership around much of the world (Burand, 2010).

When deciding on either a masculine or a feminine occupation, both women and men are guided by similar values (Davey & Lalande, 2004). For example, both women and men who choose to be engineers are largely motivated by interest values and least motivated by altruistic values. However, when women choose to pursue a non-traditional career, they usually display unconventional personality traits and behaviours (Phillips & Imhoff, 1997). It therefore seems expedient to consider not only biological sex but also psychological gender (Bem, 1974) as a determinant of career success in women working in male environments, all the more so that masculinity is often located, highlighted taking in consideration the context of work and organizations (Morgan, 1992). When planning their careers, masculine women are less fearful of success than feminine women (Strykowska, 2006). They also perceive their workplace as very stressful (Lipińska-Grobelny, 2008) and most women managers represent androgynous and masculine types whereas women who are not managers represent the androgynous and feminine types (Lipińska-Grobelny & Wasiak, 2010). Finally, women experience the conflation of masculinity mobilization and work as harmful (Martin, 2001).

Cross-cultural research using the Bem Sex Role Inventory has found that preference for masculine trait descriptors of the ideal manager correlates positively with the masculinity of the national culture in the studied country (Gmür, 2006). This suggests that women’s success in a masculine work environment is a function not only of their individual masculinity but also of masculinity as a social category. The masculine vs. feminine national culture dimension introduced by G. Hofstede (2001) is defined as the extent to which values which are popular among men (assertiveness, money, things) exceeds typically feminine values (education,
quality of life, people). In feminine cultures women have much easier access to masculine occupations (Strykowska, 2006). In masculine cultures women are more assertive and competitive but not as assertive and competitive as men (Hofstede, 1997). Since masculinity affects work-related values (Hofstede, 2001), and since national culture and corporate culture interact in specific firms (Dalton & Kennedy, 2007), masculine traits will presumably be part of the bank worker’s job description and this tendency will be more pronounced in countries with a more masculine national culture. This prediction has been confirmed. A study conducted at an international bank found that the masculinity dimension was present but it was also less pronounced than, for example, the power distance dimension (van Nimwegen, 2006).

2. OBJECTIVE AND HYPOTHESES

2.1. OBJECTIVE

The purpose of the present study was to determine the effect of several factors on women’s career success in a masculine work environment (bank): biology (sex), culture (gender identification), individual traits (emotional intelligence) and environment (work engagement).

2.2. HYPOTHESES

- The main predictor of women’s success in a male work environment would be masculine gender (Petrides & Furnham, 2006, p. 563)
- If the national culture is the more masculine the effect will be larger.

Drawing upon existing findings concerning the masculinity of Austrian (MAS=79), Polish (MAS=64) and Romanian (MAS=42) cultures (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010), it was predicted that:

- The gender-success relationship would be strongest in Austria, moderate in Poland and weak in Romania.

3. METHOD

The study was run on 152 participants, all of whom were employees of the same financial corporation. The Polish sample consisted of 24 women and 15 men aged 35-39 (M=37.2, SD=1.1). The Romanian sample consisted of 32 women and 16 men aged 30-34 (M=32.3, SD=1.3). The Austrian sample consisted of 32 women and 33 men aged 35-39 (M=38.5, SD=1.8).
3.1. MATERIALS

All participants completed a questionnaire battery in their mother tongue measuring 1) gender identification: The Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI; Bem, 1974) in its national translations – Polish (Kuczyńska, 1992), Romanian (translated experimental version, which obtained Cronbach’s alpha=0.82), and German (Schneider-Düker & Kohler, 1988); 2) work engagement: The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES – 9-item version; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003) in its national translations – Polish “Praca i Samopoczucie”, Romanian “Scala Pentru Starea de Bine în Organizări” and German “Arbeitsengagement”; 3) emotional intelligence: The Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (TEIQe-SF; Petrides & Furnham, 2006) in its national translations – Polish (Wytykowska & Petrides, 2007), Romanian (translated experimental version, which obtained Cronbach’s alpha=0.87) and German (Freudenthaler et al., 2008); 4) an inventory assessing career success, and 5) socio-demographic variables. Participants with high scores on the masculine and androgynous scales constituted the “masculine” group and participants with high scores on the feminine and undifferentiated scales constituted the “feminine” group.

3.2. PROCEDURE

The study was conducted via the Internet, individually. Every participant got a special link to the survey. At first the participant had confirmed his agreement in participation and than completed a questionnaire battery.

4. RESULTS

No significant differences were found between women and men’s ratings of success in the masculine work place. However, masculine participants (M=2.20, SD=0.54) declared higher success than feminine participants (M=1.88, SD=0.61), t (135) = 3.46, p<0.01. A similar tendency was found in masculine women who experienced significantly – t (78) = 3.19, p<0.01 – higher success (M=2.19, SD=0.50) than feminine women (M=1.81, SD=0.59). The effect size (Cohen’s d = 0.72) suggests a powerful relationship between masculine psychological gender and women’s success in a masculine work environment.

In order to determine whether masculinity affects women’s success in a masculine work environment depending on the masculinity of the national culture, a two-way 3 (nationality: Polish, Romanian, Austrian) x 2 (gender identification: masculinity, femininity) analysis of variance was conducted with experienced success as the dependent variable. A significant main effect emerged for nationality: F (2,82) = 4.42, p<0.05, η² = 0.1. Means-pair comparison revealed that Romanian women feel more successful than Austrian women (0.34, p<0.05) and
Polish women (0.36, p<0.05) (Fig. 1). The main effect of sex role was also significant: $F(2,82) = 10.70$, $p<0.01$, $\eta = 0.01$. Further analysis showed that masculine women reported higher success than feminine women (0.37, p<0.01).

In order to check whether male biological sex is a better predictor of success in a masculine work environment than work engagement, emotional intelligence or masculine gender a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted according to the following design: 2 (sex: men, women) x 2 (work engagement: low, high) x 2 (emotional intelligence: high, low) x 2 (psychological gender: masculine, feminine) where experienced success was the dependent variable. The main effect of engagement, $F(1, 136) = 10.61$, $p<0.01$, $\eta^2 = 0.07$ and the main effect of emotional intelligence, $F(1,136) = 6.37$, $p<0.05$, $\eta^2 = 0.04$ were significant. Pair comparisons yielded two significant differences in level of experienced success: between high engagement and low engagement participants (0.34, p<0.01) and between high emotional intelligence and low emotional intelligence participants (0.27, p<0.05). No significant interactions between variables were found.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Of all the factors analyzed in this study two, work engagement and emotional intelligence, had a direct effect on the experience of success in a masculine work.
environment and one, psychological gender, had an indirect effect. The first two factors probably facilitate higher professional self-esteem. Emotional intelligence has been found to contribute uniquely to the prediction of professional success and may in fact play an important role in career success (Lopes et al., 2006) but on the other hand the contribution of emotional intelligence to successful workplace behaviour has been discarded as a myth (Zeidner, Matthews & Roberts, 2004) and when personality variables are included, EI accounts for only 3% of the variance of job performance. Meanwhile, although masculinity continues to be a man’s domain, it contributes to experienced career success in both sexes. The fact that over half of the women in our study were masculine or androgynous suggests that women (at least those who work in banks) exhibit masculine attributes and act in what has traditionally been considered a “masculine” way. This is all the more probable that no connection has been found between biological sex and success. Auster & Ohm (2000) highlighted that the difference between men and women in terms of masculinity has been decreased. Women who work in banks have to cope with men’s domination in the work place and perhaps they do so by showing off their achievements (Spender, 1988). This strategy could well lead to increased experience of success. It is hard to say if experienced success is the cause or effect of this strategy. The reasons for choosing a masculine or feminine profession do not depend on biological sex but they do depend on psychological gender (Davey & Lalande, 2004) and therefore masculinity may predispose women to feel they have succeeded just as it may predispose them to take financial risks (Meier-Pesti & Goetze, 2006). However, to conclude that women’s occupational functioning is becoming more masculine we would have to carry out more research. What we would have to know is whether the particular work environment determined this or whether it was a sign of a more general trend. Perhaps the unique organisational culture of international organizations highlights universal, “extra-sexual” sources of career success (e.g. work engagement, emotional intelligence), even in work environments that fit the masculine and feminine stereotypes. Person-environment fit (Sekuguchi, 2004), i.e. the match between an employee’s individual characteristics and the specific job, may also be important.

Our cross-national comparisons have not confirmed the formerly observed (cf. Hofstede, 2001) difference between Polish and Romanian culture on the masculinity-femininity dimension, suggesting that these two cultures are similar (cf. the World Values Survey). The time of data collection may have led to this discrepancy. Older cohorts are at a disadvantage compared with younger cohorts. On the other hand, the theory of evolution of societies may explain the similarity between Poland and Romania as far as sense of success is concerned. While the earlier data on Romania and Poland could partly be accounted for by the post-socialist passivity of the two societies, this trait has changed dramatically within the last two decades and entrepreneurship greatly accelerated in both countries following the EU accession. Next, the difference in sense of success between
Romanian and Austrian women, suggested on the basis of original research, has been empirically supported. The greater sense of success in feminine and undifferentiated women in Romania than in Austria indicates indirectly that masculinity of the work place has less effect on female employees in Romania than in Austria. It looks as if these cross-national comparisons are reliable because all participants were bank workers and the same international financial group employed them. Finally, our results open new, interesting vistas for the further study of Romanian society. A discussion of all these aspects and their interrelationships is beyond the scope of this paper but in the present study the Romanian sample was younger in terms of age and employment duration yet it occupied higher positions than the Polish and Austrian samples. What is more, the Romanian women declared a significantly higher level of achieved success compared with their Polish and Austrian counterparts.

To conclude, it is good to know that success in a masculine work environment does not depend on employees’ sex and that sex stereotypes have less effect on behaviour than we thought.

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REZUMAT

Inteligenta emoțională, genul subiecților, implicarea în muncă, și masculinitatea culturii naționale sunt predictori de succes pentru femeile care lucrează într-un mediu de lucru de câteva bărbăți. Angajații băncii în Polonia (N = 39), România (N = 48) și Austria (N = 65), au participat la acest studiu trans-național. Angajamentul de muncă și inteligenta emoțională au fost semnificativ legate de succes și experiență. O relație semnificativă a fost, de asemenea, găsită între masculinitate și succes, indiferent de sexul subiecților. Femeile masculine au declarat, de asemenea, niveluri mai ridicate de succes în cariera în domeniul bancar decât femeile caracterizate ca de feminitate. Femeile din țări diferite în masculinitatea culturii lor în mediu natural se manifestă diferite niveluri de succes în carieră iar femeile din România au declarat că dețin cel mai inalt nivel de succes. Atât genul cât și cultura pot fi considerate ca factori determinanți ai succesului în carieră.