Are women the New Men? Travelling the Paths toward Internationalization of Women Executives

BEATRIZ D. GOSADAN
http://orcid/org 0000-0002-9407-7863l
beatrizdgosadan@gmail.com
Central Mindanao Colleges, Kidapawan City, Philippines

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ABSTRACT

History would tell us categorically that women in the past were relegated to the background. However, the 21ˢᵗ century has changed the lives of women in the workplace arena where they were elevated on an enviable pedestal in leadership, management, education and skills training. This paper focused on describing the workplace challenges, opportunities and insights of women executives in Kidapawan City. Using phenomenological research design, multiple frameworks in data collection (friendly conversations, reflection analysis, and on-line interview) data analysis through story-telling writing helped me drew several themes which established the data's trustworthiness regarding credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. With better portrayal on their professional development, the 15 women executives welcome the opportunities traveling the paths, climbing the traditional ladders, and running down their companies, there is one constant at them: they cultivated their success. They have enjoyed opportunities brought about by professional credibility, great sense of

responsibility, and most importantly, financial independence. They have faced the challenges in leadership, human behavior, and high expectations, however, family and work-life balance remain the biggest issue that has affected them emotionally. It was through prayers and family support that these women drew strength from. Hence, even if they were judged by society as weak, they continue to inspire the world.

Keywords — Multicultural, challenges and opportunities, qualitative design, Kidapawan City, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

History has placed women at the background, however, with the power shift toward women at work, education, and performance, the traditional male is dying out as women out-performed men economically (Myers, 2016). Looking ahead at the dawn of the 21st century, we have witnessed the increasing importance placed upon the role of women occupying corporate board and senior management positions in the companies worldwide (Shinner, 2012). The rising number of women executives is a global phenomenon branding them as the new men in the 21st century (Bachelet, 2011). The lives of women have changed drastically over the past hundred years and were placed in a position of advantage.

Women changed the workplace arena and made traipse in positioning themselves to move into the leadership pipeline. The Grant Thornton International Business Report (2014) likewise indicated that women held 24 percent of senior management roles around the world (www.dlsu.edu.ph). In the Philippines, the ratio of Filipinas taking on leadership positions in business has increased. Dumlao (2014) added that the proportion of Filipina CFOs (chief finance officers) has been steady at 59 percent. Women representation on boards continues to improve globally. European countries lead the way in gender diversity in the boardroom (Konigsburg, Yuen, Withers, Bachelder, Sabia, & Touraine, 2015). Further, the higher presence of women on boards and top management is associated with better firm performance (Carter & Wagner, 2011) while small banks chaired by women are less likely to fail during a financial crisis (Palvia, Vähämaa, & Vähämaa, 2015). On the average, women hold 12 percent of board seats worldwide, with European countries leading the way in gender diversity in the boardroom. It was reported that for the first time in history, women are less than a percentage point away from making up the majority of the national workforce (Cassel, 2017) The economic downturn has hit men harder (Belle, 2011).

In particular, female Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) are becoming considerably more prevalent in businesses around the world. Women CEOs around the world has risen by 71 percent from 2.1 percent in end-2004 to 3.6 percent in end-2013 and predicted that women will constitute about one-third of new CEO appointments by 2040 (Unite, Sullivan, & Shi, 2016). A most interesting comparative study confirmed that women scored higher than men on the 12 of the 16 leadership competencies. Regarding function, women received higher ratings than males on the traditional male bastions of sales, legal, engineering, IT and Research and Development. As women move higher to the organizational ladder, the more positively they were perceived to be effective than men (Sherwin, 2014).

With all these changes, the women now look tall and elevated from the dominations of the past regarding leadership and management. Today, more than 70 percent of women have increased their productivity in the workplaces (Frimpong, 2012).

Being a woman of principle and advocate of just dealings with every human being and a former woman executive, I find it interesting to make an in-depth investigation of the upsweeping phenomena of women leaders in schools. Moreover, it sought to describe the work challenges and opportunities of women executives being the prime movers and chainsaw lilies in their industries, and hopefully, the result will give some insights to the other women who are on deck for promotion in the executive or managerial level.

Parenthetically, the Commission of Higher Education (CHEd) and Department of Education (DepEd), in coordination with other organizations for Gender and Development (GAD) encourages studies and programs for women empowerment. In addition, traceable studies on the challenges and opportunities for women executives in the education sector were seldom explored, thus, this study was pursued.

FRAMEWORK

This study is of great importance for the promotion of Gender Equality which refers to the equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities of men and women (www.ohchr.org) in their employment. This condition of gender equality is an aspiration of women all over the world (Sucharipa-Behrmann, 2013). To add, the guiding premise of this study was based on the principles and advocacies of the Magna Carta for Women (MCW), Convention on the Elimination of All

Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and United Nations (UN) Program for Women.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study was undertaken to describe the challenges and opportunities of the women executives and discuss the insights and suggestions they can share to other women who are newly appointed in the executive position or who are prospects to be the next women executives in Kidapawan City.

METHODOLOGY

This study is a qualitative design using a phenomenological tradition. Phenomenological research centers on the description of the experience of the participants (Bueno, 2016). The focus of a phenomenological study according to Patton (2002) lies in the narrative of what people experience and how they feel about the experience. This study, therefore, resulted in describing the work experiences of women executives.

A total of 15 women executives from the different sectors in Kidapawan City were the respondents. Fifteen as a minimum for most qualitative studies works very well when the participants are homogeneous (Latham, 2013). They were purposively chosen based on the following criteria: appointed women executives, have been in the position for at least two years, eager to participate in the research and willing to sign a letter or consent.

The data collection steps included the setting of the boundaries for the study, conversation through semi-structured, reflection analysis and on-line interview as well as establishing the protocol for recording information. The study employed story-telling writing since I focused on stories of the lived experiences of women executives. The use of the four criteria about the participants' knowledgeability, credibility, impartiality, and willingness to respond (Kumar, 1989) were satisfied by the 15 participants. As part of the ethical standards in research, voluntary consent from the participants was sought and assured them that the researcher will uphold confidentiality and that their rights would surely be respected.

In the analysis and interpretation, the researcher used the suggestions of Colton and Covert (2007) regarding the sorting and categorizing of the data by applying a coding system of recurring themes. The data were analyzed guided by the framework of qualitative study as discussed by Creswell (2007). To ensure

trustworthiness of the data, the researcher strictly observed credibility - through thick description, transferability - which informants were purposively chosen, dependability - through stepwise analysis, code and decode, and confirmability - through an audit trail. Though the participants were the women executives, the researcher allowed the use of any language so that the participants will be comfortable to share. Those above were strictly observed because in qualitative research, the inquirer anticipates any issue related to ethics (Richards & Schwartz, 2002). Researchers need to protect their research participants by developing trust with them, promoting the integrity of the research, guarding against misconduct and any impropriety that might reflect on their organizations or institutions, and cope with new challenging problems (Creswell, 2007).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Having employed the story-telling in writing the results of this inquiry, the following themes were derived from the responses of the participants.

Work Challenges of Women Executives. Women, strong as they are, were confronted with a lot of challenges that will truly test their capacity and faith. However, a lot of them believe they can handle their crisis.

Leadership. One of the challenges among women executives is on the leadership skills and styles. As leaders, it is their role to inspire, delegate, collaborate, communicate, influence and gain respect from the industry and the ability to learn and change which conforms with the statement of the Center for Creative Leadership (2014). Women executives are often stereotyped being called emotional instead of just being passionate (Silsbee, 2008). The participants felt that they were perceived by men and other women as vulnerable. They said that they have experiences that they outsmarted by other employees and belittled in their capacity.

Also, the most crucial leadership challenge shared by one of the participants was on dealing with minor annoyances from the organization. While leadership presents them the opportunity to demonstrate the best of what they are, it also exposes their limitations which agree with Rabinawitz (2016) who stated that good leaders have to overcome those restrictions to realize their vision.

Concerning corporate leadership, Dowd (2005) said that the sad truth is, women only get to the top positions after those places were devalued. The contemporary culture of the United States stated that women were lauded as having the right combination of skills for leadership, yielding superior leadership

styles and outstanding effectiveness (dev.womensurgeons.org). Women still portray a suffering disadvantage in access to leadership positions as well as prejudice and resistance when they occupy these roles. To the participants, they believe that women and men display somewhat different leadership styles within limits set by their leader's roles. They were faced with accommodating the sometimes conflicting demands of their roles as women and their roles as leaders. In general, people expect and prefer that women executives be manifesting traits such as kindness, concern for others, warmth, and gentleness.

Human Behavior. Women executives have considered the presence of varied behavior in the different industries. When they were pondered with issues, they understand that the behaviors exhibited by the employees fall within a range with some conduct in common, some unusual, some acceptable as influenced by their culture, values, attitudes, and ethics. Most of the participants shared that they find it hard to mobilize people because they seemed to be uncooperative and does not show initiatives. This finding agrees with Andersen (2012) when she also shared that most managers encounter these unmotivated employees, spending a disproportionate amount of time, thought, and emotional energy on them. Some employees expressed their discomfort on the task assigned, and they were counting on what they have done. Their social attitudes of being insensitive trigger the start of gossips and power struggles. This result was supplemented by McLeod (2014) when she said that people pick social aggressiveness from their personal experiences or observation which dictates their formation of values.

Family and Work- Life Balance. Women executives also face the challenges in the family and work-life balance during their first year of service when the expectation for more outputs/accomplishments is high. The participants recognize the importance of work and family in life. However, there are some instances of which company work, domestic work, and childcare responsibilities conflict at the same time. As shared by most participants, prioritizing one is sometimes hard to set because of some concerns even when you are in the workplace already. The role of being a wife, a mother and an executive may sometimes conflict due to the hectic schedules. Thus, quality time for the family was sometimes sacrificed. In a study conducted by Hall and Chandler, (2005) they declared that viewing one's job of an executive, as a calling is a factor in one's ability to achieve a work-life balance. Calling on work was found to be a significant factor among executives and has a positive effect on work-life balance.

Even though women executives enjoyed the flexible time for work, there are also instances of extended work hours which make it hard for them to set

what to take first. Similarly, work-life balance scholars have suggested that work-life balance itself is conceptually unique from work-life enrichment and work-life conflict due to the global perspective of balance, and was supported by role theory (Carlson, Grzywacz, & Zivnuska, 2009). The emphasis of balance rests in the individual's ability to meet the demands of the roles imposed by work-life and family life. Being the primary caregiver for the family, they are guilty at times when they cannot give much attention to the needs of their family members due to some conflict in schedule. Women entrepreneurs indicate that they deploy several strategies to cope with the double workload and challenges deriving from combining business with family but while self-employment may provide flexibility. On the self-employed status of women, a study showed that there was a negative relation on the amount of time spent caring for children and success. Furthermore, successful women in the business rely on the support from their husbands, partners, and relatives.

High Expectations Needed for Output. When women executives were elected or appointed to the position, it is expected of them by the board that the company's portfolio will improve and the company's asset will increase. They feel that with their strength as women, they will be able to do better than the previous company statistics. However, to some women executives' experience, they said that their employees would criticize them if they will not be able to reach their school requirement. But to some women executives, they believe in their charm, and they were expecting to get more clients because of the professional integrity that these women executives have established in the society. Tatum (2017) agreed with the findings and stated that the greatest challenge to high expectations is the achievement gap itself. Many women executives enter the job fully dedicated to establishing and maintaining high expectations. And yet, as they encounter the stark reality of their workers' relatively low skill levels, they find their faith in maintaining high expectations was shaken, if not destroyed, by the gap between their workers' current performance and high company achievement.

Further, the high level of expectations in their accomplishments is another challenge met by women executives. To them, the expectation of the agencies would lead them to work hard for extended hours. According to Babson College's 2012 Global Entrepreneur Monitor, the fear of failure is the top concern of women who launch startups. Failure is a true possibility in any business venture, but Passi (2012) said that it should not be viewed as a negative. What makes the high expectations of the society is the confidence imbibed to them by the different companies. Some participants shared that their coaching and mentoring

styles were some of the reasons why their companies were expecting too much from them. The women executives believe that their sharing of knowledge to their employees will help increase the participation of their people. The finding was supported by the article of Lloyd and Associates (2016) said that most women executives would like to develop their employees so that they can learn to make decisions and to take the initiative themselves. Women executives prefer giving rewards that come from the success and the skill of their colleagues than the rewards they get from their supervisors. In 2016, Rosenthal has published his article citing that expectations were translated into behaviors through the following: climate, feedback, input and output, and stressed that women executives set more praises and criticisms to teach their employees to increase their skills.

Opportunities for Women Executives. Women were designated as the new engines for growth and the rising stars of the economies to bring prosperity and welfare. Thus, women were blessed with opportunities for this generation.

Higher Compensation Package and Benefits. The informants also shared their opportunities. The main benefit was the financial aspect. Most of them recognized the monetary upside since there are more benefits that they enjoyed. Aside from their salaries, they also enjoy representation and travel allowances and percentages of the company's productivity. Other remunerations were reflected in their travel and leisure while on business trips for attendance in meetings and conventions and other activities. Garvett (2015) explained that Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) get paid much for being the top employees in the company. Vested with a high level of talent that is required to produce the desired product, they have the skills and responsibilities that are extreme, and the number of people who can fill these roles are limited. As a general rule, base salary accounts for just 20 percent of a CEO's pay. The other 80 percent comes from performance-based pay (Sherwin, 2014).

High Professional Credibility. Aside from their measured accomplishments and high compensation, women executives carry with them the prestige of having professional credibility. Not just their companies, but the whole society as well trusted them and appreciated their characteristics because of their high educational status, their experiences, and their professional development. For most executives, it will not be hard for them to convince some clients or stakeholders for educational or business investments with them because of the credible relationship they have established in the society. This result agrees with Kerns (2003) who said that leaders who were credible and act with integrity can

create a comfortable workplace culture where society is treated with fairness and respect. They were committed in promoting a fair culture and ethical behavior.

Regarding the women opportunities, they said that they had established their names in the society through their company. This prestige made them easy to convince the society for their different success stories and in marketing their schools. They believe that their expertise in their schools comes from a blend of their education and experience. The participants believe that the high integrity is a package deal perceived to them by society. Women executives also know that the degree of credibility assigned to them by people was based on how they do sound judgment and expertise.

High Sense of Responsibility. Women executives were aware of their obligations. With their responsibilities, they were able to influence the lives of their stakeholders. They also focused on their goals to realize their vision. Serving people at their full potentials is also an opportunity for them. Kockina (2015) said that people with a strong sense of responsibility are also hard-working and ambitious. If they find the balance, no goal is too difficult for them to achieve. People high in responsibility have advantages over others. Their deep sense of dedication means that they have a psychological possession of their work. They are people who keep their words.

Participants also emphasized that they were also training or coaching other employees as second liners for their future promotion. One informant said that to mentor people they delegate some tasks to them with supervision. Mentoring is also central to one's management success. If the most valued employees were mentored, they will realize their full potentials and take their skills to the next level. Mentoring also improves employee retention (Hoerwath, n.d.).

Another opportunity gained by women executives is the high sense of responsibility. In their sharing, women executives know that they are morally accountable for their behavior. They take responsibility for their actions and are good at independent decision-making. Further, Jenkins (2017) agrees with the participants' idea that a strong sense of responsibility and the employees' work were related. Being responsible motivates the leaders to show their best ability. They do not make commitments that they are not prepared to follow through. They have trust and confidence in their words. In their eyes (and in the eyes of others), they are always the right women for the job.

Insights of Women Executives

Participants were asked for their thoughts or suggestions. For the future executives, the following were their words of wisdom: Be yourself, Work hard and love your work, Pray for God's guidance, and Be proactive. Moreover, their suggestions are the following: Know your people, Manage your stress and Continue to Dream.

Be true to oneself. The participants were eager to share their insights and suggestions with some future executives. First, they wanted the future managers to be true to themselves. It is central to be honest and maintain such integrity. For most women executives, it is an important thing for future executives to keep themselves well grounded. Being true to yourself means that you perform based on what you reflect (Wright, 2008). Participants also wanted future executives to remain firm in their decisions and be cautious on the words that come from their mouths.

Kunc and Morecroft (2010) stated that there is a framework of behavioral view of decision-making processes. These are the creative conceptualization of new resource configurations that are intended to deliver competitive advantage and the other one is the painstaking development of resources required to implement the strategy.

Work Hard and Love Your Work. Based on the experiences of the women executives, they emphasized to the future executives to work hard and love their work. Even if employees are in the position, they should not rest on their laurels. They need to work hard because of that commitment to share the passion in making things happen. Inamori (2009) supported the findings and said that the best way for employees to be motivated is to love their work. No matter what the task is, if everybody put all their efforts into accomplishing their job, they'll gain a great sense of achievement and confidence, and have the motivation to face new challenges. Repeating this process enhances their fondness for their job. When this happens, they will spare no effort and be able to achieve wonderful results. Kupka (2012) agreed with this finding and said that there is a best time and prospect for us to create our own destiny. Loving one's job is essential for our entire society and our overall well-being.

Pray for God's Guidance. The participants believe that above all knowledge is God's Divine Intervention. Their appeal to the future executives was for them to let God be at the center of their life. Women executives should pray in making their decisions, their actions, and in their words. Hopler (2016) agrees to the findings stressing that when confusion stops us from making important decisions

in our lives, what we need is God to guide us towards our best choices. Prayers of faith will help us make decisions that reflect God's purpose in our lives. Robbins (2004) also noted that many individuals place great emphasis on another's advice that validates their preferred choice. It is a wisdom from God.

Know Your People. Women executives stressed the importance of knowing their people since they will be working with them as a team. They believe that the better they understand their people, the better they will relate to them. They also need to leave the door open for the employees to come and share their thoughts. There are essential points listening to the cues of your employees and talk to them. You will hear their hearts, and you will understand them better. Lencion (2015) stated that when employees feel anonymous in the eyes of their managers, they cannot love their work, even if they receive a lot of money or if they have the best jobs. But if their managers recognize them, they will eventually work harder, promote the company's best practices, recruit other people and make sacrifices for customers.

To the participants shared that listening to their employees' stories made them understand their struggles. Tapping the shoulders' of their employees will help to connect with them better. One participant said that it is comforting also for her to hear some positive thoughts from their employees about the tapping of their shoulders and having time to talk to them. One participant was happy sharing her story that a son of her employee whom she met in the mall thanked her for granting his father's cash advances during his college days to pay for his tuition. And she said, that made him so inspired to reach his dream and now working as a bank manager. The words of gratitude captured her heart.

Keep a Legacy of Your Leadership. To the participants, keeping a legacy in their leadership is something they will be proud of to leave after their term of office. It is in the minds of the women executives to place themselves to achieve. They need to work hard and accomplish more together with the engagement of their people. They need to be focused on their goals and come up with some strategies to attain them. They should gain friendship from their people and share their knowledge and expertise to their successors. They should be objective in their decisions and should value competition among their similar entities.

Inspire People. The participants have different views of inspiring their people or employees. Future women executives should keep a positive attitude and explore all the avenues to reach out their people and encourage them in so many ways. People who inspire us to be better are not weak, scared or stuck. They are bold and have the fortitude and courage to push through their fears, and take

a stand on what they believe (Caprino,2016). One participant said, they should learn to wear different hats in different situations so that they will be able to get the hearts of their employees. Inspiration involves changing the way people think and feel about themselves so they can take actions. It taps into people's values and desires (Witt, 2012). They need to appreciate the individual performance of their people as a team and insist the proper mind set. They should be ready to become mentors/coaches of their employees so they will also be more competent in their jobs.

CONCLUSION

The cultivation of women executives in career success is what they wanted. They have built their success through sheer and determination. They know that they have the skills and the desire to do something great. Although to them, it is not an obligation but a challenge to reckon. They have traveled different paths, some climbing the traditional corporate ladders, some zigzagging upwards by jumping between companies, some by starting and running down their businesses. No matter what the course, there is one constant: each of these women executives has cultivated her success. As women executives, they too have different challenges not just in their workplaces, but also at home, and in the society.

Women executives have different stories of their concerns since they lead a double life- at home, at work, and in the society as well. Most of them said that the aspect of family and work-life balance was an issue that affected them emotionally. They make sure that they would exhaust the best strategies for them to surpass the challenges in the workplace. For them to cope with these issues, they said they faced them and used human psychology to beat the challenges. Establishing a friendly relationship in the workplace is a remedy to avoid some stresses. However, there are workmates who would try to test their leadership abilities. Women executives were always positive that they can perform what was expected of them by their schools. Even the challenges they experienced have made them stronger and smarter as an effect. They believe that they do not need to be the other person but their true selves instead. Being true to themselves brought them to their dreams. Listening to them during the interview was truly inspiring. They are the source of enlightenment to all future executives. Indeed, unveiling the success barriers of these women executives, without receiving judgment and belittlement was therapeutic. It was a privilege as well as a blessing on my part to hear the participants share their expertise on this phenomenon.

This study has brought inspiration to me as a researcher. I felt inspired by the optimism of the participants to make things happen. I felt I was not alone in my journey. I am going to share with some future executives or next in rank employees about the experiences I have learned from this research. I remembered the different stories of the participants and filled with awe at how they lived their lives despite the challenges they are facing in the workplace. I was reminded of the value of determination and perseverance that has helped me achieve my dreams and surpassed all the challenges that a woman executive might encounter.

The women executives manage to handle themselves in situations where they are very vulnerable. They develop coping mechanisms. These mechanisms are necessary to avoid the undesirable effect on them. Competing demands between work and home have assumed increased relevance for employees because of demographic and workplace changes. They have different forms of defense mechanism such as unwinding with friends and families, converting negative thoughts to positive thoughts, hard prayers, shopping, taking more time to sleep and resorting to things that keep them busy.

Working with God as the center of all the things they do was also noteworthy. The participants drew strength in their mind, body, and spirit through hard prayers. They know that even if they have the competence and expertise, they still need the Divine intervention to achieve their goals and make things happen. Some members of the society have already started accepting women as capable of accomplishing their goals. They believe that success is not dependent on gender. However, women executives still felt that they were being judged by society as weak, but for the women executives they believe, they have inspired the world.

Being a woman executive is an honor since they have the chance of serving the company to the best of their ability. It is also a reward because their hard work has been paid off. The different situations they shared are indeed worth keeping when they climbed the ladder towards their success. Their words serve as an inspiration not just to the other women executives or the future women executives but being a former woman executive because I believe I was right in my decisions, I worked within my principles, and I have reached my dream. To those who are in the same boat with the participants of the study may take their suggestions/advice.

For those in the society, they humbly request people to show their support instead of being judgmental. The participants have worked hard for their positions and have passed through qualifications for promotion. Based on the responses of the participants, they don't want people to talk against them and

be the center of the discussions, instead, they need the support of the society to achieve their company goals. Let us pray and support them in any way. In the context that they have a lot of roles in life, they wanted to be understood better regarding their availability in the different activities, and their decision making. For the women executives, the result of this study is giving them an opportunity to be explored in the kind of life they have vis-à-vis the roles they perform in their daily lives so that society will be sensitive to them. Moreover, employees must learn from these people, particularly to their contributions in their companies and the development of the city as well.

TRANSLATIONAL RESEARCH

The result of the study could be translated into a journal article for international publications, social media, and other media for information dissemination and to strengthen the government programs for women.

Additionally, government, non-government agencies and other interested funding agencies were encouraged to translate it into a more comprehensive program that could help address the concerns of the women sector. Finally, it can be explained by sharing this research with the employees for them to hope for a better opportunity.

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