THE IMPACT OF FEMALE LEADERSHIP IN ASIAN SERVICE INDUSTRIES: A CONTINGENCY PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the effectiveness of female leadership in Asian service industries across various environmental contingencies; demands endemic to fast food and casual dining firms, as well as demands emanating from national culture. Multivariate regression analysis of employee responses to surveys indicate that employees with female managers in fast food firms reported significantly greater job satisfaction than employees with male managers. Employees in casual dining firms rated female leaders as being significantly more effective than male leaders. These findings have significant implications for firms operating in Asian markets. Although Asian women possess competitive advantages over male leaders, the number of females holding leadership positions in Asian countries remains far below that of Western countries.

Environmental and Cultural Contingencies

Both full-service and fast-food restaurants were examined. Full service restaurants require frequent service encounters between customers and employees For customer loyalty in full-service restaurants, excellent service is as important as food quality. Antecedents to service quality are subordinate empowerment and casual and effective communication between front-line employees and supervisors The propensity for women to have a more democratic and cooperative style of leadership would most likely lead female managers to be rated as more effective in a casual dining context.

Fast-food restaurants adopt self service to increase convenience and speed of food delivery utilizing a standardized operation system, pre-processed foodstuffs and service scripts. Customer loyalty stems from cleanliness, friendliness, and price. Fast food industry conditions result in emotional labor and resultant stress becomes a major burden for fast-food workers. A humanistic leadership approach which would reduce employee stress and increase job satisfaction is similar to the stereotypical characteristics of the Korean female as being nurturing, warm, sacrificing, and caring.

Two cultural dimensions from Project Globe; Gender Egalitarianism (GE), the extent to which society minimizes gender role differences; and Humane Orientation (HO), the degree to which individuals are rewarded for being caring and kind to others were included in the study. Each dimension was assessed using two manifestations of each dimension. *What Should Be* measured values widely shared within each specific culture; representing "correct" orientations as they addressed desired organizational practices. *As Is* measured respondents' perspective as to what behaviors, practices, rules and norms were commonly used within the culture. *As Is* and *What Should Be* scores are often inversely related, *As Is* scores being the lower, indicating that actual

practices often fall short of desired practices. South Korea's *As Is* score is significantly lower than its *What Should Be* score. The current study attempts to determine if there are differences in subordinate outcomes which may be related to the GE and HO of their immediate superiors.

Leadership Styles

Project GLOBE identified global leadership dimensions termed culturally endorsed implicit leadership theories (CLTs); classes of leadership characteristics contributing to effective leadership. Cultural variations affect endorsement of CLTs considered to be effective leadership styles. This study focuses two CLTs related to the cultural dimensions examined in this study. Participative Leadership is the degree to which managers involve others in making and implementing decisions. Participative Leadership and GE are significantly correlated. South Korea had the lowest *As Is* GE score , yet had a significantly higher *What Should Be* GE score, indicating Koreans' desire for greater gender equality, which would relate to participative leadership being highly valued.
Humane-Oriented Leadership include supportive and consideration-oriented behaviors on the part of the leader. Humane-Oriented Leadership and HO are significantly correlated. Korea's HO *As Is* score is moderate while its HO *What Should Be* score is significantly higher, indicating a desire for an increased use of Humane-Oriented leadership than currently practiced.

Findings

Multivariate regression analyses of employee responses to surveys addressing employee job satisfaction and subordinates' perception of leader effectiveness were conducted using data collected from U.S.- franchised casual and fast-food firms operating in South Korea. Results supported several notions related to leadership style as it addresses specific contingencies. Research expressing the need to fit leadership styles to cultural preferences, the current study supported the notion that the "proper" style of leadership may be dictated by environmental demands specific to the work environment as well as by country-specific cultural preferences. In a culture that primarily uses male-dominated leadership, significantly greater job satisfaction was noted for subordinates employed in fast food firms who reported to female managers than the job satisfaction of subordinates reporting to male supervisors. Additionally, subordinates in casual dining facilities who reported to female managers rated female managers as being significantly more effective than male managers.

Contributions and Limitations

The study identifies contingencies which may exist in organizations as they relate to the choice of leadership style, providing a general guide for managerial staffing in service industry firms operating under varying cultural demands. Firms should avoid cultural stereotyping as a method of determining effective leadership styles and would be better served by identification of specific situational.
 Due to differences in environmental characteristics, findings of the study may not be applicable to other type firms within the service industry, or to firms outside the service industry. Additionally, the findings may not be applicable in nations with distinctly different cultural preferences from those noted in Korea