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Gender Differences of Human Resource Professionals in the Sri Lankan Private Sector

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Abstract

Gender, gender identity and gender differences are discussed by different scholars in different contexts for different purposes as a popular concept today. However, in the available literature, there is no any single finding on which gender most prefers to be Human Resource professionals. There are couple of studies aimed to discuss sex categories of HR professionals. Therefore, the problem of the study is: which gender prefers to be HR professionals in the Sri Lankan private sector organizations. This study selected 100 HR professionals as the sample, representing private sector organizations in Sri Lanka and data were gathered using Bem Sex Roll Inventory (BSRI) scale developed by Bem. The majority of the HR professionals in the private sector were male sex – typed and it was more than 50% of the sample. Androgynous type of gender presented by the HR professionals in the private sector was 20% and same percentage of HR professionals was presented undifferentiated gender type. There was no any single HR professional in female sex – typed gender.

Key word: HR Professionals, Male sex-typed, Androgynous, Female sex-typed

Introduction

Over the last decades, women working in the field of human resource management have been a remarkable increase (Reichel, Brandl and Mayrhofer, 2011). According to Hardin (1991), Monks (1993), Roos & Manley (1996), Simpson & Lenoir (2003) growing body of research scrutinizes the division of work between female and male human resource (HR) professionals (Reichel, et al, 2011). Traditionally human resource management as a profession has been a female domain (Legg, 1987) and today women are especially in number than men in this profession (Roos and Manley, 1996). However, there are few women representing the senior managerial positions (Kelly & Gennard, 2001). According to Reichel, Brandl and Mayrhofer in 2011, male HR professionals in the traditional context were associated with managerial tasks and women HR professionals were over involved in administrative tasks. A study done by Reichel and others in 2011 tried to examine the gender egalitarianism effect of male and female HR Managers. Gender as a vital concept in applying to social analysis and World Health Organization (2003) mentions that gender is culturally and socially constructed roles, responsibilities, privileges, relations and expectations of women and men. APA (2011) refers gender as attitudes, feelings, and behaviors that a given culture associates with a person's biological sex. Despite the fact that males and females may be different along personality measurements in the general population, it is be discussed and debated the significance of gender based personality divergences within the general managerial positions (Guthrie et al, 2003; Morrison and Glinow, 1990). As Legge and Niven, HR profession has a feminine image while female HR managers are underrepresented in higher level positions (Canniffe, 1985; Gooch, 1994; Long, 1984; MacKay, 1986; Monks, 1993; Roos and Manley, 1996). However, a contradictory view is given by Gooch and Ledwith in 1996 as HR manager positions are masculine reflections. In the traditional context, HR management positions in the lower hierarchical level were represented by women and managerial positions in the higher hierarchical level were represented by men (Gooch and Ledwith, 1996). Then, it is very clear which gender of HR professionals play a significant role in the working context.

Problem of the Study

Gender is a different human behavioral element than sex. According to general observation in the Sri Lankan context, many managers and executives who are working in the capacity of HR Managers or HR Executives are male than female. According to the available literature, there is no any clear idea about the dominant gender of HR Professionals. Few research findings reveal that the most preferred gender to be managers and leaders are the masculinity than the femininity (Rozier and Hersh-Chochran, 1996; Rosener, 1990; Changanti, 1986; Eagly and Johnson, 1990; Kabacaff, 1998; Yammarino et al, 1997; Bass et al, 1996; Bloksgaart, n.d.; Atwater et al, 2004; Schein, 2001; Cejka and Eagly, 1999; Glick, 1991; Moenig et al, 2011). On the other hand, there are no any single empirical findings about the gender differences on HR Professionals in the Sri Lankan context. It creates a research gap on which gender prefers HR professions. Then, the problem of the study aims to discuss "which gender type dominates the HR Professionals in Sri Lanka?"

Literature Review

Sex and gender are two different concepts (Ali, 2011). Sex is a dimension of human life (Adkins, 1980) and biological characteristics (Ali, 2011; Seymour-Smith, 1986). However, many researchers have referred to gender differences based on biological sex (Butler and Nolen-Hoeksama, 1994; Oliver and Toner, 1990; Pidano and Tennen, 1985) and Oakley (1972) was the first author to distinguish sex and gender. Then it leaded to discuss the researches on sex-gender differences, their relative absence (Durkin, 1978; Jacklin and Maccoby, 1975), masculinity-femininity as psychological scales, sex-gender roles and gender socialization (Broadbridge and Hearn, 2008). Gender refers to social structure behaviours related to masculinity and femininity (YWu-Mng, 1990, 2009). As said by Ali (2011) man and women are referring to sex and femininity and manhood are referring to gender. According to Eagly in 1987, domestic role is played by women and worker role is played by men. Many social scientists widely use the distinction between sex and gender (Wilber, 1988). Masculinity and femininity provide collective, organized and dichotomous-meaning of gender (Pleck, 1987).

In the general field of management, there are research findings of feminine leadership style which was tended to engage by women (Rozier and Hersh-Cochran, 1986; Eagly and Johnson, 1990; Kobacaff, 1988; Yammarino et al, 1997; Bass et al, 1996). Most work tasks and jobs are gendered and work task or job may be either feminine or masculine (Bloksgaart, n.d.). Masculine gendered job are for example, fireman and policeman while secretaries, educators and nurses become various form of femininity gendered jobs (Bloksgaart, n.d.). Compared with women, more masculine leader stereotype was played by men (Eagly and Karau, 2002) and more than women, men believe that masculine qualities have been good for leaders (Atwater et al, 2004; Schein, 2001). However, in the female-dominated field, leadership may be less masculine as elementary education, nursing or librarianship. The reason for demanding less masculine leadership qualities for these jobs are depended on qualities like warmth, compassion and female skills for these jobs (Cejka and Eagly, 1999; Glick, 1991). According to the role congruity theory, Moenig and others (2011) stressed the tendency for leader roles that is to be perceived as masculine as a result of meta-analysis. However, there are several factors that moderate leadership and masculinity. According to Hackman and others in 1993, all subordinates perceived masculine in male and female leaders were effective. As Chaganti (1986), Rosenger (1990), Eagley and Johnson (1990), Bass et al (1996), Rozier and Hersh-Cochran (1996), Yammarino et al (1997) and Kabacaff (1998), management and entrepreneurship studies indicated that women tend to engage in more feminine leadership styles. The application of the Bern Sex-Inventory using 684

business students, Powell and Butterfield (1979) pointed out that a good manager would be seen as androgynous (possessing both masculine and feminine characteristics).

In the HRM context, there is no any sound and clear idea about which gender prefers to be HRM professionals. However, as Hanscome and Cervero (2003), human resource development field presents the feminized qualities. Bloksgaart (n.d.) stresses that masculine rationalities are dominated in the HRD field.

Method

In this study all HR Professionals in Sri Lankan Private sector have been selected as the population. The sample refers to subset of the population (Sekaran and Bougie, 2011). Therefore, a considerable number of HR Professionals of the above population has to be selected as the sample of this study. According to the nature of this study, it is advisable to use convenience sampling method as it is efficient and a quick method to gather data. The selected sample will be 100 HR Professional in Sri Lankan Private sector. Also, this sample is consisted of both male and female HR Professionals in different percentage. The questionnaire was used to gather the primary data and the questionnaire was developed based on the Bem Sex Roll Inventory (BSRI). This inventory was designed by Bem in 1974 to facilitate empirical research on gender differences. During the last 25 years, this BSRI has endured as an instrument which investigates the gender role orientation by researchers (Beere, 1990). The scale of the BSRI is on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 'never or almost never true' (01) to 'always or almost always true' (07). Twenty of the characteristics are stereotypically feminine while 20 are stereotypically masculine. Remaining 20 items are considered filler items by virtue of their gender neutrality (Hoffman & Borders, 2001). Therefore, in this study 40 items of the BSRI version was used to measure the masculinity and femininity of the worker. The items of masculinity are self-reliant, defends own beliefs, independent, athletic, assertive, strong personality, forceful, analytical, has leadership abilities, willing to take risks, makes decisions easily, self-sufficient, dominant, masculine, willing to take a stand, aggressive, acts as a leader, individualistic, competitive, and ambitious. The items of femininity are yielding, cheerful, shy, affectionate, flatterable, loyal, feminine, sympathetic, sensitive to the needs of others, understanding, compassionate, eager to soothe hurt feelings, soft-spoken, warm, tender, gullible, childlike, does not use harsh language, loves children and gentle (Kosterina, 2009).

The masculinity and femininity among workers were measured by their responses to the questionnaire with seven points scale. All questions were ranked by using very positive aspect of the item (7: always or almost always true) and very negative aspect of the item (1: never or almost never true). The questions numbers of 1 to 20 which were the masculinity questions in the questionnaire and total scores of the responses were divided by 20 to find out the masculinity score. The questions numbers of 21 to 40 which were the femininity questions in the questionnaire and total scores of the response were divided by 20 to find out the femininity score. The interpretation for the total marks for each sex roles are as follows (table 01).

Table 01: Total score for each sex roles

	Masculinity greater than 4.9	Masculinity less than 4.9
Femininity greater than 4.9	Androgynous	Female sex-typed
Femininity less than 4.9	Male sex-typed	Undifferentiated

Results

The sample consisted of 64 (64%) male HR professionals and 36 (36%) female HR professionals. The overall mean value of the masculinity of the sample was 5.3620 (BSRI Scale) and therefore there is a strong masculinity value in the HR professionals in Sri Lanka irrespective of sex categories. The overall mean value of the femininity of the sample was 4.34 (BSRI Scale) which indicates that overall femininity of the sample, irrespective of the sex categories, was relatively low. The overall mean value of the masculinity of male HR professionals was 5.4078 (BSRI Scale) and the overall mean value of the femininity of male HR professionals was 4.3906 (BSRI Scale). The overall mean value of the femininity of female HR professionals was 4.3556 and it is less than 4.9 (BSRI Scale) and overall femininity of female HR professionals was not strong. The overall mean value of the masculinity of female HR professionals was 5.2806 (BSRI Scale).

Table 02 indicates the overall analysis of the masculinity and femininity orientation of total sample, male HR professionals and female HR professionals.

According to Table 02, male and female HR professionals were oriented to masculine qualities than the feminine qualities. Self reliance, self-sufficient, act as a leader and competitive were the masculine qualities which are less than the total sample while majority of feminine qualities were less than 4.9 (BSRI value) in the total sample. Assertive and individualistic were the only two masculine qualities less than 4.9 (BSRI value) of male HR professionals and dominant, masculine, aggressive and individualistic were less than 4.9 (BSRI value) of the female HR professionals in this sample. The overall picture indicates that male and female HR professionals were having majority of masculine qualities than the feminine qualities.

Table 02: Orientation of Masculinity and Femininity of HR Professionals

Total sample		Male HR professionals		Female HR professionals	
Masculinity	**Femininity**	**Masculinity**	**Femininity**	**Masculinity**	**Femininity**
Self-reliant	Yielding	Self-reliant	Yielding	Self-reliant	Yielding
Defends own beliefs	Cheerful	Defends own beliefs	Cheerful	Defends own beliefs	Cheerful
Independent	Shy	Independent	Shy	Independent	Shy
Athletic	Affectionate	Athletic	Affectionate	Athletic	Affectionate
Assertive	flatterable	Assertive	flatterable	Assertive	flatterable
Strong personality	Loyal	Strong personality	Loyal	Strong personality	Loyal
Forceful	Feminine	Forceful	Feminine	Forceful	Feminine
Analytical	Sympathetic	Analytical	Sympathetic	Analytical	Sympathetic
Has leadership abilities	Sensitive to the needs of others	Has leadership abilities	Sensitive to the needs of others	Has leadership abilities	Sensitive to the needs of others
Willing to take risks	Understanding	Willing to take risks	Understanding	Willing to take risks	Understanding
Makes decisions easily	Compassionate	Makes decisions easily	Compassionate	Makes decisions easily	Compassionate
Self-sufficient	Eager to soothe hurt feelings	Self-sufficient	Eager to soothe hurt feelings	Self-sufficient	Eager to soothe hurt feelings
Dominant	Soft-spoken	Dominant	Soft-spoken	Dominant	Soft-spoken
Masculine	Warm, tender	Masculine	Warm, tender	Masculine	Warm, tender
Willing to take a stand	Gullible	Willing to take a stand	Gullible	Willing to take a stand	Gullible
Aggressive	Childlike	Aggressive	Childlike	Aggressive	Childlike
Acts as a leader	Does not use harsh language	Acts as a leader	Does not use harsh language	Acts as a leader	Does not use harsh language
Individualistic	Loves children and gentle	Individualistic	Loves children and gentle	Individualistic	Loves children and gentle
Competitive	Are yielding	Competitive	Are yielding	Competitive	Are yielding
Ambitious.	Cheerful	Ambitious.	Cheerful	Ambitious.	Cheerful

	More than 4.9 BSRI value
	Less than 4.9 BSRI value

The analysis of the gendered HR professionals is given in Table 03.

Table 03: Gender Differences of HR professionals

	Frequency	Percent
Androgynous	28	28.0
Male Sex-typed	52	52.0
Undifferentiated	20	20.0
Total	100	100.0

According to Table 03, there were 28 of HR professionals out of 100 from the sample who are Androgynous. It means that 28% of the sample of HR professionals responded more than 4.9 of masculinity and femininity scores of the BSRI scale. Male Sex-typed HR professionals were 52% of the sample and it means that masculinity of the sample is greater than 4.9 value and femininity of the sample is less than 4.9 of the BSRI scale. Less than 4.9 of masculinity and femininity of the BSRI scale indicate undifferentiated and there were 20% of HR professionals in this category.

Table 04 indicates the gender differences of HR professionals. Among the Androgynous HR professionals (28 HR professionals), all masculine qualities were higher than 4.9 value except aggressiveness and individualistic quality while all famine qualities of Androgynous HR professionals were higher than 4.9 value except the traits of shy, loyal, femininity, guible, childlike other femininity traits are strong. There were 52 respondents who have sex - male typed gendered and among masculinity traits of the sex male -typed HR professionals, aggressive trait becomes low masculine quality (3.96). The overall masculinity of undifferentiated HR professionals was 3.94 and all the characters have low level of masculinity (less than 4.9). Overall femininity of undifferentiated HR professionals was 3.715 that means low level of femininity gender type.

Table 04: Gender differences of HR professionals

Androgynous		Male Sex-Typed		Undifferentiated	
Masculinity	**Femininity**	**Masculinity**	**Femininity**	**Masculinity**	**Femininity**
Self-reliant	Yielding	Self-reliant	Yielding	Self-reliant	Yielding
Defends own beliefs	Cheerful	Defends own beliefs	Cheerful	Defends own beliefs	Cheerful
Independent	Shy	Independent	Shy	Independent	Shy
Athletic	Affectionate	Athletic	Affectionate	Athletic	Affectionate
Assertive	flatterable	Assertive	flatterable	Assertive	flatterable
Strong personality	Loyal	Strong personality	Loyal	Strong personality	Loyal
Forceful	Feminine	Forceful	Feminine	Forceful	Feminine
Analytical	Sympathetic	Analytical	Sympathetic	Analytical	Sympathetic
Has leadership abilities	Sensitive to the needs of others	Has leadership abilities	Sensitive to the needs of others	Has leadership abilities	Sensitive to the needs of others
Willing to take risks	Understanding	Willing to take risks	Understanding	Willing to take risks	Understanding
Makes decisions easily	Compassionate	Makes decisions easily	Compassionate	Makes decisions easily	Compassionate
Self-sufficient	Eager to soothe hurt feelings	Self-sufficient	Eager to soothe hurt feelings	Self-sufficient	Eager to soothe hurt feelings
Dominant	Soft-spoken	Dominant	Soft-spoken	Dominant	Soft-spoken
Masculine	Warm, tender	Masculine	Warm, tender	Masculine	Warm, tender
Willing to take a stand	Gullible	Willing to take a stand	Gullible	Willing to take a stand	Gullible
Aggressive	Childlike	Aggressive	Childlike	Aggressive	Childlike
Acts as a leader	Does not use harsh language	Acts as a leader	Does not use harsh language	Acts as a leader	Does not use harsh language

Individualistic	Loves children and gentle	Individualistic	Loves children and gentle	Individualistic	Loves children and gentle
Competitive	Are yielding	Competitive	Are yielding	Competitive	Are yielding
Ambitious.	Cheerful	Ambitious.	Cheerful	Ambitious.	Cheerful

☐ More than 4.9 BSRI value
▨ Less than 4.9 BSRI value

Findings

The major finding of the study is that majority of HR professionals were male-sex type gendered. Other types of gendered HR professionals in the sample were androgynous and undifferentiated. Both categories of gender differences are less in number compared with the male-sex type of gender. However, there is no female-sex type gender in the HR professionals of the sample. The overall summary of the gender differences of the sample is given in Table 05.

Table 05: Summary of Findings

Findings	% out of all sample	Masculinity/Femininity	Intensity	
Sex-Male typed	52%	Masculinity	5.746	Strong
		Femininity	4.175	Low
Androgynous	28%	Masculinity	5.664	Strong
		Femininity	5.228	Strong
Undifferentiated	20%	Masculinity	3.940	Low
		Femininity	3.715	Low

Discussion of the Gender Differences of HR Professionals

Gender differences of the HR professionals of the study was measured based on Bem Sex Roll Inventory. According to the Bem Sex Roll inventory all gender types can be divided into four types as androgynous, female sex-typed, male sex-typed and undifferentiated. In this study there are only androgynous, male sex-typed and undifferentiated HR professionals. Female sex-typed HR professionals are not in this study. Due to lack of the available theoretical and empirical finding on this topic, it is very difficult to discuss the HR professionals' gender orientation with the global context. However, HRM was a field which is dominated by women in the history (Men and Women in HRM-A balanced mix? (online, 03/11/2014). The reason was that HRM was a field of welfare activities and welfare activities are done by women workers. This is a contradictory view of the finding of the study. However, as Berryman-Fink (1997) female managers over time reject the feminine stereotype and adapts to the male-dominated corporate culture.

The major finding of the study is that HR professionals become male sex – typed and can be justified by giving ideas of Witherspon (1997). Witherspon explained the male manager behaviour such as more task roles, giving more opinions, argumentative, dominant decision-making, criticising opinions and ideas of others (1997). The qualities of the HR professionals in many cases, female characteristics such as nurturing roles, interrupt for clarification, disclosing information, more supportive of other speakers, avoiding conflict, asking compromises explained by Witherspon (1997) are remained very low level in this sample. The female qualities such as less competitive, more accommodating, willing to share power, willing to discuss divergent viewpoints than men (Burrell et al., 1992) are not the part of the personality in many cases in the HR professionals in Sri Lanka.

Conclusion of the ideas of different authors mentioned above is that HRM was a female dominant field and currently it is shifting to the male domination. In the Sri Lankan practices,

majority of HR professionals are male than female and this is serious at the top positions in the HRM hierarchy of the organization. However, Eagly and Johnson (1990) stressed that subordinates' perspective, male and female professionals were rated as equally effective.

However, HR professionals in US and UK, the character orientations are openness, emotional resilience, agreeableness, teamwork, extraversion, assertiveness, image management, optimism, work drive and visionary style (Lounsbury et al, 2008). These traits of HR professionals were matched with the findings of the study in many cases.

According to the findings of the research male sex-typed, androgynous and undifferentiated HR professionals are in the HR field in Sri Lanka. Among these gender types majority of HR professionals are male sex-typed and androgynous. That means strong masculinity is very important for them.

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