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A STUDY ON ENSURING A MORE INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE INFORMAL GROUP

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ABSTRACT

A lot has been said and written about workplace informal groups. By and large the presence of workplace informal groups has been welcomed by several stakeholder categories, subject of course to a few caveats. The commonest caveat is that the goals the informal groups chase should be in line with the goals the organisation concerned chases. *Prima facie*, such a caveat is welcome but often this caveat is projected as the pivot on which alone the success of the informal group rests. Other aspects are often side-lined or ignored with the result that the informal group's performance at times gets suboptimal and less inclusive. A little bit of fine-tuning, like ensuring that the informal group gets more inclusive, can go a long way in raising workplace productivity. The researcher's findings reveal that persuading more and more women employees to associate with committed workplace informal groups can go a long way in ensuring that the entire workforce jells at the workplace, leading to superior productivity for the organisation. Although a few valid reasons come in the way of the women employees associating themselves actively with the workplace informal groups, if the right inducement is made available at the right time to the women employees, a more inclusive workplace informal group will emerge. Ensuring a better shop floor presence for women employees, allaying their fears and suspicions and ensuring a fair workplace treatment for them are among the measures the researcher suggests, to forge a more inclusive and committed workplace informal group.

KEYWORDS

caveat, forge, informal group, jell, stakeholder, workplace.

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1.1 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM

People are supposed to work in groups and to bond properly with each other at the workplace, to achieve organizational goals. They must jell to become a team. Teams are designed, forged and recognized formally by the organization. These formal teams apart, many employees bond as a team or teams, of their own volition, driven explicitly or otherwise, by some shared goals and objectives. Obviously, these are informal groups owing to their very constitution. Whether low profile or high profile, whether welcomed by the management or resented by the management, such informal groups are ubiquitous in organisations.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The role the informal groups play in the functioning of the organisation and their impact on the functioning of the organization can be ignored only at great peril. This is because when such informal groups engage in tasks which eventually benefit the organisation, the organisation concerned will be harming itself if it does not acknowledge the contribution of the informal group concerned to its growth. The informal group concerned will deliver even more if it is more representative and more inclusive in its composition and character. This requires that it accommodate women employees too. After all, the workplace no longer being an exclusive male bastion, a balanced and thus, a more inclusive informal group could well turn out to be an important bastion of defence of women's workplace rights.

1.3 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

1. The role of groups and teams within organizations is intensely investigated these days (Zoltan & Vancea, 2015). But there are many aspects where investigation is overdue, aver the researchers. This ground reality is to be considered in the backdrop of a globalised economy which has triggered a slew of new opportunities and challenges. Thus, the researchers bring out the differences obtaining between formal groups, informal groups and teams. But they confine themselves to differences that arise mostly between group work and team work. They explain the consequences of the application of the wrong type of work style in a given situation considering the relevance of such application to the actual global work environment.
2. According to the researchers, more precisely, positive forms of synergy in teams are generated by individual behaviours (Zoltan R. , 2014). They lead to additional efforts being made for completion of the task on hand. Collectively, these efforts exert a positive influence on the performance of the team.
3. The researchers examine the literature on work team effectiveness by considering their nature, defining them, and identifying four critical conceptual issues—*context, workflow, levels, and time* (Kozlowski & Bell, 2013). *Using the conceptual issues* as review themes, the researchers analyse the many forms that teams may assume. They examine the key aspects of the creation, development, operation, and management of work teams. To ensure that their research is comprehensive in terms of coverage, they adopt a *lifecycle perspective* to organize the review. The perspective embraces the following: (1) team composition; (2) team formation, socialization, and development; (3) team processes, effectiveness, and enhancements; (4) team leadership and motivation; (5) and team continuance and decline.
4. Informal groups tend to emerge in organizations owing to the advantages they generate for the members (Dyer & Dyer, 2013). The groups promote social and cultural values which the group members value rather highly. Social status and satisfaction accrue to only those who are part of the group. The groups ease and popularise communication across group members. Collectively, these lead to an enhancement in the quality of the general work environment.
5. A combination of a simple task and team work invariably lead to failure, often invoked in case of teams, but without a prior analysis of its causes, aver the researchers (Millward, Banks, & Riga, 2010). For example, Millward, Banks and Riga are convinced that team work is a designing strategy that organises work in a flexible and coordinated manner. It should logically lead to synergies. In the real world, however, they generally fail to fulfil even the summative criterion.

1.4 RESEARCH GAP

The reviewed literature has done well to highlight the beneficial consequences that accompany the emergence of informal groups at the workplace. However, one wishes that the reviewed literature had thrown some light on the need to render these informal groups as inclusive as possible in the light of the fact that there is nothing like a male bastion in the present-day globalised business scenario. It is this gap the present study seeks to bridge.

1.5 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study confines itself to the major stake-holders, namely, organisations and HR experts based out of Bangalore, Karnataka.

1.6 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study are to:

1. Ascertain the reasons behind the suboptimal level of association of women employees with informal groups at the workplace.
2. Examine how more and more women employees can be induced to associate with committed informal groups at the workplace.

1.7 HYPOTHESIS PROPOSED TO BE TESTED

The study proposes to test the hypothesis "The Indian society by and large being patriarchal, women's association with the informal groups is not missed."

1.8 RESEARCH DESIGN

The following paragraphs explain how the research is designed.

1.8.1 Research methodology

The study is descriptive in nature and uses the 'fact-finding' survey method. Interview schedules specially designed for the purpose were administered to the respondents for collection of primary data. Being a structured / directive interview, the interview was conducted with a detailed standardised schedule.

1.8.2 Sources of data

Data required for the research has been collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data has been collected from C-suite executives and HR experts as explained earlier.

Secondary data has been collected from the web sites of the financial press, finance portals, the National HRD Network, trade / industry bodies like CII, FICCI and the ministry of HRD of the government of India, in soft version and hard version.

1.8.3 Sampling plan

C-suite executives: Given the limited number of investors in the area covered by the study, purposive or judgement sampling under the non-probability method has been deployed. The researcher selected 30 C-suite executives from organisations operating in the area covered by the study at least for the past five years. This criterion, according to the researcher, is the most appropriate one for the present study. What is important is the typicality and the relevance of the sampling units to the study and not their overall representativeness to the population. Thus, it guarantees inclusion of the relevant elements in the sample. Probability sampling plans cannot give such a guarantee.

HR experts: Given the limited number of consultants in the area covered by the study, purposive or judgement sampling under the non-probability method has been deployed. The researcher selected 30 HR experts operating in the area covered by the study at least for the past ten years. This criterion, according to the researcher, is the most appropriate one for the present study. What is important is the typicality and the relevance of the sampling units to the study and not their overall representativeness to the population. Thus, it guarantees inclusion of the relevant elements in the sample. Probability sampling plans cannot give such a guarantee.

1.8.4 Data collection instruments

Interview schedules, specially designed for the purpose, were drafted and pre-tested in order to identify the possible weaknesses in the instrument. Upon receipt of feedback, they were appropriately revised and finalised for administration to the respondents for collection of primary data.

The Interview Schedules featured open questions and closed questions. Open questions were included since the objective was to identify opinions, ascertain degrees of knowledge and seek suggestions and more information. In some cases, the subject matter of the question could be outside the range of the respondent's experience and hence open questions were deemed a better alternative. Further, open questions would help in determining the depth of the feelings and intensity of the expressions of the respondent (Krishnaswamy & Ranganatham, 2005). Open questions might give the respondent a chance to think through the topic. Since it is practically impossible for the researcher to assess the level of information possessed by the respondent, open questions came in handy. The response freedom inherent in open questions could elicit a variety of frames of references from the respondent, which might provide unanticipated insights. Given the qualitative nature of the values the variables would elicit from the respondents, they could lend themselves ideally to statistical tools like Likert scale and chi-squared test.

1.8.5 Data processing and analysis plan

Non-parametric statistical units were used to test the association between some qualitative characters and conclusions were drawn on the basis of formation of H_0 and H_1 . To be specific, Likert scale / chi-square test were applied to test the hypotheses.

1.8.6 Limitations of the study

Primary data has at times been deduced through constant topic-oriented discussions with the respondents. It is possible that a certain degree of subjectivity, albeit negligible, has found its way in. In addition, one has to admit that the respondents, being human, could err. Hence, the researcher would like to admit that the findings of the thesis, which draw equally heavily from the discussions the researcher held with the said respondents, may have been affected, albeit to a negligible extent. In the circumstances, it will not affect the accuracy of the findings of the study.

1.9 ANALYSIS OF PRIMARY DATA COLLECTED FROM THE C-SUITE EXECUTIVES

In the following paragraphs, the primary data collected from the 30 C-suite executives is analysed.

1.9.1 Reasons behind the suboptimal level of association of women employees with informal groups at the workplace

Informal groups have been ubiquitous in organisations since time immemorial. In some organisations, they are prominent and in some, they are not. However, it is believed in informed circles that women employees do not generally associate with the workplace informal groups actively. Hence the researcher requested the respondents to reveal the possible reasons behind such suboptimal level of association of women employees with informal groups. Their replies to the query appear in the following Table.

TABLE 1: REASONS BEHIND THE SUBOPTIMAL LEVEL OF ASSOCIATION OF WOMEN EMPLOYEES WITH INFORMAL GROUPS AT THE WORKPLACE

Reasons	Number of respondents
Domestic commitments come in the way of women employees contributing their mite to the informal groups	26
Women employees' presence on the shop floor is negligible	26
The Indian society by and large being patriarchal, women's absence in the informal groups is not missed.	25
Women employees fear that informal groups may not chase goals and objectives that originate in shared values	23
Women employees suspect that informal groups choose individual goals and objectives over organisational goals and objectives	21
More of women employees fear that their association with informal groups will displease the management.	20

(Source: Primary Data)

26 respondents cite the reason that domestic commitments come in the way of women employees contributing their mite to the informal groups. 26 cite that women employees' presence on the shop floor is negligible. 25 cite that the Indian society by and large being patriarchal, women's absence in the informal groups is not missed. 23 cite that women employees fear that informal groups may not chase goals and objectives that originate in shared values. 21 cite that women employees suspect that informal groups choose individual goals and objectives over organisational goals and objectives. 20 cite that more of women employees fear that their association with informal groups will displease the management.

1.9.2 Inducing more and more women employees to associate with committed informal groups

These days organisations have been placing more and more emphasis on adherence to principles of gender equality and equal opportunities. Such adherence should make it easier for more and more women employees to associate with committed informal groups provided the right inducements are made available to the women employees at the right time. Hence the researcher sought to know from the respondents how more and more women employees can be induced to associate with committed informal groups. Their replies to the query appear in the following Table.

TABLE 2: INDUCING MORE AND MORE WOMEN EMPLOYEES TO ASSOCIATE WITH COMMITTED INFORMAL GROUPS

Inducements	Number of respondents
Convince the women employees that there is perfect alignment between the goals and objectives of the informal group and those of the organisation	27
Assure the women employees that they will not be relegated to a secondary role in the informal group	26
Assure the women employees that the leadership norms applied to them will not be discriminatory	24

(Source: Primary Data)

From the above table 27 respondents, convincing the women employees that there is perfect alignment between the goals and objectives of the informal group and those of the organisation will induce more and more women employees to associate with committed informal groups. According to 26 respondents, assuring the women employees that they will not be relegated to a secondary role in the informal group will induce more and more women employees to associate with committed informal groups. According to 24 respondents, assuring the women employees that the leadership norms applied to them will not be discriminatory will induce more and more women employees to associate with committed informal groups.

1.10 ANALYSIS OF PRIMARY DATA COLLECTED FROM THE HR EXPERTS

In the following paragraphs, the primary data collected from the 30 HR experts is analysed.

1.10.1 Reasons behind the suboptimal level of association of women employees with informal groups

Informal groups have been ubiquitous in organisations since time immemorial. In some organisations, they are prominent and in some, they are not. However, it is believed in informed circles that women employees do not generally associate with the informal groups actively. Hence the researcher requested the respondents to reveal the possible reasons behind such suboptimal level of association of women employees with informal groups. Their replies to the query appear in the following Table.

TABLE 3: REASONS BEHIND THE SUBOPTIMAL LEVEL OF ASSOCIATION OF WOMEN EMPLOYEES WITH INFORMAL GROUPS

Reasons	Number of respondents
The Indian society by and large being patriarchal, women's association with the informal groups is not missed.	27
Women employees' presence on the shop floor is negligible	26
More of women employees fear that their association with informal groups will displease the management.	26
Women employees fear that informal groups may not chase goals and objectives that originate in shared values	26
Domestic commitments come in the way of women employees contributing their mite to the informal groups	25
Women employees suspect that informal groups choose individual goals and objectives over organisational goals and objectives	24

(Source: Primary Data)

From the above table about 27 respondents cite the reason that the Indian society by and large being patriarchal, women's absence in the informal groups is not missed. 26 cite that women employees' presence on the shop floor is negligible. 26 cite that more of women employees fear that their association with informal groups will displease the management. 26 cite that women employees fear that informal groups may not chase goals and objectives that originate in shared values. 25 respondents cite the reason that domestic commitments come in the way of women employees contributing their mite to the informal groups. 24 cite that women employees suspect that informal groups choose individual goals and objectives over organisational goals and objectives.

1.10.2 Inducing more and more women employees to associate with committed informal groups

These days organisations have been placing more and more emphasis on adherence to principles of gender equality and equal opportunities. Such adherence should make it easier for more and more women employees to associate with committed informal groups provided the right inducements are made available to the women employees at the right time. Hence the researcher sought to know from the respondents how more and more women employees can be induced to associate with committed informal groups. Their replies to the query appear in the following Table.

TABLE 4: INDUCING MORE AND MORE WOMEN EMPLOYEES TO ASSOCIATE WITH COMMITTED INFORMAL GROUPS

Inducements	Number of respondents
Convince the women employees that there is perfect alignment between the goals and objectives of the informal group and those of the organisation	27
Assure the women employees that the leadership norms applied to them will not be discriminatory	27
Assure the women employees that they will not be relegated to a secondary role in the informal group	26
Assure the women employees that informal group members will personally supplement their efforts	26
Convince the women employees that the objectives have their origins in shared values, beliefs, attitudes and thought processes.	25

(Source: Primary Data)

From the above table 27 respondents, convincing the women employees that there is perfect alignment between the goals and objectives of the informal group and those of the organisation will induce more and more women employees to associate with committed informal groups. According to 27 respondents, assuring the women employees that the leadership norms applied to them will not be discriminatory will induce more and more women employees to associate with committed informal groups. According to 26 respondents, assuring the women employees that they will not be relegated to a secondary role in the informal group will induce more and more women employees to associate with committed informal groups. According to 26 respondents, assuring the women employees that informal group members will personally supplement their efforts will induce more and more women employees to associate with committed informal groups. According to 25 respondents, convincing the women employees that the objectives have their origins in shared values, beliefs, attitudes and thought processes will induce more and more women employees to associate with committed informal groups.

1.11 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

In the following paragraphs, a summarised version of the findings arrived at, by analysing the primary data furnished by respondents, is furnished:

1.11.1 C-suite executives

- 26 respondents cite the reason that domestic commitments come in the way of women employees contributing their mite to the informal groups. 26 cite that women employees' presence on the shop floor is negligible. 25 cite that the Indian society by and large being patriarchal, women's absence in the

informal groups is not missed. 23 cite that women employees fear that informal groups may not chase goals and objectives that originate in shared values. 21 cite that women employees suspect that informal groups choose individual goals and objectives over organisational goals and objectives. 20 cite that more of women employees fear that their association with informal groups will displease the management.

- According to 27 respondents, convincing the women employees that there is perfect alignment between the goals and objectives of the informal group and those of the organisation will induce more and more women employees to associate with committed informal groups. According to 26 respondents, assuring the women employees that they will not be relegated to a secondary role in the informal group will induce more and more women employees to associate with committed informal groups. According to 24 respondents, assuring the women employees that the leadership norms applied to them will not be discriminatory will induce more and more women employees to associate with committed informal groups.

1.11.2 HR experts

- 27 respondents cite the reason that the Indian society by and large being patriarchal, women’s absence in the informal groups is not missed. 26 cite that women employees’ presence on the shop floor is negligible. 26 cite that more of women employees fear that their association with informal groups will displease the management. 26 cite that women employees fear that informal groups may not chase goals and objectives that originate in shared values. 25 respondents cite the reason that domestic commitments come in the way of women employees contributing their mite to the informal groups. 24 cite that women employees suspect that informal groups choose individual goals and objectives over organisational goals and objectives.
- According to 27 respondents, convincing the women employees that there is perfect alignment between the goals and objectives of the informal group and those of the organisation will induce more and more women employees to associate with committed informal groups. According to 27 respondents, assuring the women employees that the leadership norms applied to them will not be discriminatory will induce more and more women employees to associate with committed informal groups. According to 26 respondents, assuring the women employees that they will not be relegated to a secondary role in the informal group will induce more and more women employees to associate with committed informal groups. According to 26 respondents, assuring the women employees that informal group members will personally supplement their efforts will induce more and more women employees to associate with committed informal groups. According to 25 respondents, convincing the women employees that the objectives have their origins in shared values, beliefs, attitudes and thought processes will induce more and more women employees to associate with committed informal groups.

1.12 CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions are inferences / generalisations drawn from the findings and relate to hypotheses. They are answers to the research questions or the statements of acceptance or rejection of hypotheses. As explained already, this study proposes to test the following hypothesis:

“The Indian society by and large being patriarchal, women’s association with the informal groups is not missed.”

Hence H_0 and H_1 are as follows:

H_0 : Although the Indian society is by and large patriarchal, women’s association with the informal groups is missed

H_1 : The Indian society by and large being patriarchal, women’s association with the informal groups is not missed

On the basis of the primary data collected from the respondents, vide Tables: 1 and 3, a chi-square test was applied to ascertain the association, if any, between the three variables. The following Table reveals the computation made using MS-Excel.

TABLE 5

Category		Observed Values		
		Yes	No	Total
C-suite executives		25	5	30
HR experts		27	3	30
Total		52	8	60
Category		Expected Values		
		Yes	No	Total
C-suite executives		26	4	30
HR experts		26	4	30
Total		52	8	60
2	o-e	-1.0000	1.0000	
		1.0000	-1.0000	
	(o-e)^2	1.0000	1.0000	
		1.0000	1.0000	
	((o-e)^2)/e	0.0385	0.2500	
	CV	0.0769	0.5000	0.5769
	TV			3.8415
	p			0.4475

The calculated value of χ^2 is 0.5769, lower than the table value of 3.8415 for an alpha of 0.05 at one degree of freedom. Hence the null hypothesis is accepted and the research hypothesis is rejected. $p=0.4475$ is the inverse of the one-tailed probability of the chi-squared distribution.

1.13 RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the researcher’s recommendations:

- It is a fact that domestic commitments come in the way of women employees contributing their mite to the informal groups. But it does not mean that it is an extenuating circumstance that justifies the informal group remaining less inclusive. In fact, the management as well as the formal groups should put in place amenities and mechanisms like creche, pick-up and drop-back facility that will help the women employees to mitigate the burden of their domestic commitments, thereby helping them to find time to associate with the informal groups actively and proactively too.
- Organisations should make sincere efforts to raise the women shop floor employee numbers. Organisations should not give scope for anyone to suspect that appointment of women to the shop floor is entirely tokenistic.
- Indian society is by and large patriarchal. However, the law of the land has ensured that such practices do not lead to women being denied their due. The law asserts that such practices are ultra vires the law. If organisations take shelter under such feudalistic views, they need to be punished exemplarily.
- Managements should allow the necessary latitude to informal groups to be objective in their approach to the issues that confront the growth of the organisation even if such an approach rubs the management the wrong way occasionally.
- Managements should demonstrate unambiguously that women employees associating with the informal groups will not in any way displease them if such an association is intended to promote the organisation and its employees.
- It is for the informal group concerned to convince the women employees that they too will be considered for leadership positions within the informal groups. The informal group concerned should evolve the same leadership norms in respect of women employees who aspire to leadership positions.

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