The Role of Nonprofit Organizations in Overcoming Gender Inequality in Career Advancement—Take Catalyst for Example

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ABSTRACT

From the birth of the Declaration of Sentiments in 1848 to emphasize the importance of equal voting rights for men and women, the establishment of the National Organization for Women in 1966 to support the feminist movement, to the current popularity of the MeToo movement to oppose sexual harassment of women, women and others who concern gender equality strive for equal respect and equal social status and rights. However, gender inequality still exists in workplaces, and women struggle to obtain senior positions in their professions. From a sociological perspective, this paper analyzes the causes of gender inequality in career advancement including pregnancy and childcare, bias and stereotyping, male dominance and lack of networks. Next, this paper proposes the importance of women occupying senior positions, and emphasizes the role of nonprofit organizations (NPOs) in overcoming gender inequality in career advancement. Taking Catalyst, an international NPO dedicated to creating a better working environment for women, as an example, this paper concludes that to overcome gender inequality in career advancement, NPOs should promote the improvement of policies, provide services to women and researchers, strengthen the publicity of female role models and male participation, and expand cooperation.

Keywords: nonprofit organization (NPO), gender inequality, workplace, career advancement, Catalyst, social identity theory, the similarity attraction theory, the social network theory.

1. INTRODUCTION

Although feminist movements have made progress around the world, gender inequality still exists, and women cannot obtain development opportunities in public fields due to stereotypes and discrimination from society, which indicates that families prove still the main positions of women, and they struggle to achieve success in their professional fields. Lacking authority and influence in public areas means that women have difficulties obtaining senior positions. In 2020, the proportion of women in senior management positions remained only 29 percent [1]. Therefore, helping women obtain equal social resources and authority positions in their professions becomes essential for improving women's social status and achieving gender equality.

Many studies have analyzed the causes of gender inequality in career advancement and have already proposed measures to close the gender gap in terms of improving laws and promoting fair education.

Nevertheless, few studies have systematically explained the significance of women occupying senior positions from a sociological perspective. Therefore, this paper utilizes the social identity theory, the similarity attraction theory, and the social network theory to explain the reasons for gender inequality in promotions and illustrate the importance of women gaining senior positions in promoting organizational performance and achieving gender equality. Additionally, as a powerful social force, NPOs should play an active role in solving social problems, but few studies have individually included NPOs as the research subject into studies on achieving gender equality in career advancement. As a result, this paper chooses Catalyst, a global nonprofit organization dedicated to creating a better working environment for women, as the research subject to explore what can NPOs do to overcome gender inequality in career advancement.

2. THE CAUSES OF GENDER INEQUALITY IN CAREER ADVANCEMENT

2.1 Pregnancy and Childcare

Pregnancy presents a unique problem for career women, indicating that after returning to the workplace, their working ability will lag other people. Also, the organization will face the cost of personnel transfer and re-training when women leave their posts. In a survey on the female leaders in procurement departments, female interviewees said that when they return to the workplace after giving birth, they feel that their abilities to handle tasks have declined; most bosses said that after returning to the workplace, women fall behind their peers for about two years in working ability [2]. Therefore, before promoting female employees, leaders have to consider whether they will leave their jobs and have children. The unconscious bias reduces women's chances of advancement, suggesting that women who plan to become pregnant or are pregnant receive less professional support [2-3].

After giving birth, women spend an amount of time caring for children because of breastfeeding and the emotional dependence of children. If women have a child under 12 years old, they spend about 30 more hours each week on childcare than men and other childless women [4-5]. Furthermore, most organizations are reluctant to provide work flexibility policies. Even though in companies with flexible working systems, if women take advantage of these systems, they will be regarded as lacking motivation [2, 5]. In the critical period of career advancement, women invest energy in childcare, and they can't obtain flexible work policies and concerns from their organizations, and as a result, women have to give up promotion opportunities [2].

2.2 Bias and Stereotyping

Society gives people certain expectations based on their roles in social networks [6]. These expectations prove gender bias because people contend that men and women should have specific behaviors and personalities in society, occupation, and family [6]. For example, in workplaces, men should show self-confidence, dominance, competitiveness, and ambition, while women should show kindness, compassion, helpfulness, and empathy [5]. Also, the long-term division of labor based on gender differences has strengthened gender stereotypes in occupations [3]. To elaborate, men need to earn money to support their families, while women should take the role of caregivers in the family [3].

Men have long occupied the positions of senior managers in most companies [7], which urges people to form a stereotype of managers' characteristics. The traits of successful leaders are linked to male stereotypes such as determination, ambition, and logical thinking, while people associate female temperament characteristics with unsuccessful managers [8]. Therefore, the stereotype of managers and the gender bias in workplaces contribute to difficulties for women to gain leadership.

Additionally, some women have stereotypes against themselves. Individuals uncontrollably regard themselves as the prototype of the group and distinguish themselves from other groups based on the characteristics and stereotypes of their group, which indicates that women will distinguish themselves from dominant male leaders with the qualities of helpfulness, empathy, and kindness [9]. Consequently, women contend that differences exist between themselves and their managers, which can affect their desire for development.

2.3 Male Dominance and Lack of Networks

The male dominance in leadership positions affects the formation of women's social networks that prove crucial for women's promotion. In the social network theory, the strong tie develops between individuals with the same gender, occupation, and education level, while the weak tie forms between individuals with different socioeconomic characteristics, and individuals can obtain new resources without redundancy by developing weak ties [10].

The strong tie forms the basis for individuals to connect with the outside world, and the formation of the weak tie depends on the power of the strong tie [11]. The strong tie contains a stable relationship of trust and cooperation, meaning that through the strong tie, people can obtain high-quality, complex, and potential information [11], so women can obtain information that proves conducive to promotion if they have effective strong ties. However, the status quo maintains that men occupy leadership positions, thus indicating that women struggle to establish strong tie-based social networks through the common characteristics of gender and personality. Even if strong tie-based social networks are formed between women, these networks lack people with higher social status.

In social networks, some individuals have direct connections with others, but others have indirect connections or even lose connections with others, and these gaps represent structural holes that provide individuals with opportunities to fill weak ties [12]. By filling structural holes, people can obtain non-overlapping social resources. Women invest energy and time in childcare and housework, so most people who have connections with them remain relatives and members of the same department in their organizations [13]. Consequently, women lack rich and diverse social resources, so they lose their edges in promotion competitions.

3.THE IMPORTANCE OF WOMEN OCCUPYING SENIOR POSITIONS

3.1 Diversity of Leadership Styles and Organizational Performance

Leadership styles can affect the performance of organizations [8], and male and female leaders show distinctive leadership styles. First, women prefer to solve problems at work from the perspective of interpersonal relationships [14], and choose the role of informal leaders such as facilitators and organizers to replace the formal leader's identity [15], so female leaders may become democratic leaders. Second, female leaders are attentive and acute, meaning that in the organization, they can explore the potential of employees and promote their career development [16], and outside the organizations, women leaders can gain insight into changing environments [7]. In contrast, male leaders pay more attention to formal leadership, and they do not do well in developing interpersonal relationships [8].

An ideal leadership style does not exist that can produce the best leadership effectiveness, but leadership groups with diverse styles can promote organizational performance. First, in terms of financial situations, for small and medium-sized enterprises, the participation of female leaders does not increase the companies' income [17], but the participation of female leaders in innovation-oriented companies improves financial performance [18]. Second, companies with female leaders prefer to propose plans that benefit the social development and the natural environment, which can assist these companies in improving their reputation [8, 19]. Third, in crises, organizations need not only the boldness and courage of male leaders, but also the advantages of female leaders in handling interpersonal issues and their keen insight into changing environments [7].

3.2 Sense of Identity and Female Role Models

The social identity theory argues that once similar individuals form social groups due to shared characteristics, they will form specific social behaviors [9, 20]. These behaviors can strengthen members' sense of identity with their groups, marks the differences between them and other groups, and become a way to maintain group resources and authority [9, 20], and gender plays a dominant role in various social identities [21]. Once social identities are formed, people will classify positive traits into their groups and classify negative traits into other groups [21]. Even if individuals can enter a group through learning and change, the social identity based on gender proves solid and difficult to break [9]. Therefore, female leaders can help women of different levels form a sense of social identity, encouraging them to safeguard group interests and promote more women to obtain senior positions.

The similarity attraction theory shares similar connotations with the social identity theory, which refers that individuals with the same values, personality traits, and opinions attract each other, and gender provides a vital indicator for people to distinguish between similarities and differences [22]. When individuals feel similarities, they will develop psychological resonance and imitate the behavior of recognized subjects to obtain psychological satisfaction and to achieve their goals [21], thus suggesting that the influence and guidance of female role models can help women gain confidence in career development and obtain leadership positions. In a study on female clinical graduates' career challenges and satisfaction, interviewees said that the lack of guidance from suitable female mentors and the encouragement of female role models in the same field affected their career success [23]. Subsequently, female leaders can encourage other women in the same field to pursue occupational success [16, 24].

3.3 Social Networks and Social Resources

The strong tie in social networks forms the basis for obtaining social resources, and key figures with high authorities rarely appear in women's social networks because male leaders occupy a dominant position [13]. As a result, women have low-quality social networks and struggle to obtain helpful information and diverse social resources through key figures, so they face the predicament of becoming authoritative figures in their fields [13]. In addition, women spend time and energy on housework and childcare, so their social networks have high homogeneity. Therefore, it seems difficult for women to obtain rich social resources compared with men in professional development, and a single social resource hinders the emergence of female leaders [13].

From the above situation, it is not hard to see that more women achieving the status of authorities remains an essential prerequisite for women to have high-quality social networks and obtain rich social resources. However, the reality shows that the monopoly of men in the leadership role leads to a small number of female leaders, which means that few women leaders can assist other women in establishing high-quality social networks. Consequently, it seems impossible to develop social networks by increasing female leaders, but the emergence of nonprofit organizations may break this deadlock.

4. THE ROLE OF NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS IN OVERCOMING GENDER INEQUALITY IN CAREER ADVANCEMENT

4.1 The Rise of Nonprofit Organizations

4.1.1 Market Failure

Although the market has played a fundamental role in resource allocation, the market still has defects in some circumstances. The wage gaps between men and women, the difference in the social resources they obtain, and the imbalance in the ratio of men to women among leaders reflect the market failure in allocating resources between genders. Therefore, nonprofits become a system alternative to make up for the market failure.

4.1.2 Government Failure

To improve governance capacity, governments need the engagement of other stakeholders. Also, when providing public goods, governments only pay attention to the needs of the median voters while ignoring the needs of others, which contributes to social injustice. Furthermore, the information feedback sequence indicates that governments cannot respond to social problems sensitively. The lack of a suitable flexible working system and support policies to promote gender equality illustrates government failures.

4.1.3 Civic Participation

Participating in the political process to fight for their rights and shape civil society has become an inherent driving force of citizens to join nonprofits. By joining NPOs, citizens can gain negotiation power, realize ideals, and influence society [25].

4.1.4 Global Governance

The contemporary international society faces problems that transcend the boundaries of countries and regions. NPOs can play an active role in solving these problems because they can exceed the restrictions of political interests, form links between countries, and coordinate the resources of all countries and pool their forces to solve global problems. At present, the low proportion of women occupying senior positions has become a global problem. In Africa, the proportion of women in senior management positions is 38%; in Eastern Europe, the proportion of women leaders shows 35%; in North America, the proportion is 29%; and in the Asia Pacific, the proportion is 27% [1]. Consequently, to help more women gain career development worldwide and solve the problem of the uneven ratio of men and women in leadership positions require the participation of NPOs.

4.2 Catalyst: Workplaces That Work for Women

Catalyst is an international nonprofit organization dedicated to creating a better working environment for women. Since 1962, Catalyst began to promote the advancement of women in their careers. Catalyst focuses on the following four areas: improving the status of women, increasing the number of female leaders, and paying attention to the number of women from ethnic minorities in the leadership to assist women in obtaining equal opportunities for professional development; creating career development plans for women to help them obtain comprehensive, equal, and full participation opportunities in workplaces; focusing on fairness and inclusiveness in workplaces; initiating Men Advocating Real The Change (MARC) program to encourage men to participate in overcoming gender inequality in workplaces.

Catalyst gains financial support through cooperation with companies, obtains intellectual support through cooperation with think tanks, and strengthens its influence through collaboration with other NPOs. Catalyst has made tremendous progress in overcoming gender inequality in workplaces, but it still has shortcomings in collaborating with governments, and supervising governments and companies. Next, this paper will combine the effective measures Catalyst has taken and the measures that a nonprofit should take to explore how NPOs can overcome gender inequality in career advancement.

4.3 Measures Taken by Catalyst

4.3.1 Promote the Improvement of Policies

NPOs are intermediaries that help laws accurately reflect social needs. To realize the common interests of the group, obtain the guarantee for solving social problems, provide legitimate resources for the law, and form a benign cooperative relationship between governments and NPOs, NPOs ought to participate in policymaking.

In workplaces, the lack of a flexible working system and the imperfect protection system for women prove one of the main reasons for forcing women to give up promotion opportunities. As a vital way of citizen participation, NPOs should pool individual forces to participate in negotiations with the government, and promote the improvement of policies and laws that can facilitate the realization of common goals, thus indicating that Catalyst, an influential nonprofit organization that promotes gender equality in workplaces, should liaise with governments, present the organization's survey data and problem-solving plans to governments, and help governments improve current policies. Nevertheless, Catalyst pays more attention to collaboration with

companies and other NPOs, only evaluates government measures afterward, and neglects the significance of participating in the governments' decision-making to improve policies.

4.3.2 Supervise Governments and Companies

To overcome gender inequality in career advancement, NPOs need to supervise governments and companies to ensure that relevant policy implementation remains effective and obtain information for feedback. First, NPOs should be supervisors because some good policies and laws do not give full play to their due advantages in the implementation, and all the efforts made become unavailing. For instance, Iceland has become the first country to provide nine months of maternity leave to protect women's rights, and both spouses can negotiate to decide who will continue the remaining three months of maternity leave after each of the three months of maternity leave ends [24]. The system could protect women, but due to wage gaps between men and women and the expectations of family roles, most women still sacrifice their job opportunities to prioritize families [24]. Therefore, NPOs such as Catalyst should evaluate the effectiveness of policy implementation, generate investigation reports, and timely feedback accurate information to governments to adjust policies.

Second, some companies avoid hiring and promoting women to reduce the losses caused by the women's utilization of female protection policies' advantages [3]. Therefore, Catalyst can include the professional support of companies for female employees, the utilization situation of companies' security system, and the proportion of female leaders in companies into its survey scope, and publish the survey data on its official website. Consequently, job hunters can use the survey data as a reference in finding jobs, suggesting that talents who are concerned about gender equality may not choose companies that avoid implementing policies that benefit female employees. Due to reputation damage and the loss of talents, companies will support the career development of female employees.

4.3.3 Provide Services to Women and Researchers

First, NPOs should provide training opportunities to improve women's leadership skills, strengthen their sense of self-efficacy, and break their self-stereotypes. In terms of providing training and learning opportunities, Catalyst initiated the CatalystX program, which offers a large number of free online courses to help women recognize gender equality, deal with unconscious biases, and improve leadership skills. In addition, CatalystX has formed a cooperative relationship with well-known universities, and users can participate in the free courses and special degree applications through the official website of Catalyst. Through learning and training, women can enhance their sense of self-efficacy, which indicates that they have the ability and belief to achieve breakthroughs in careers [26]. The CatalystX program shows that women can learn leadership skills and gain self-efficacy with the help of NPOs, so they have the confidence and courage to pursue career development and break self-stereotypes [26].

Second, NPOs should hold exchange meetings on different topics that invite experts in related fields to participate, to encourage women to obtain non-redundant information and develop networks based on the weak tie. For example, Catalyst regularly organizes virtual workshops, and each workshop contains corporate managers and front-line staff, which offers women a valuable opportunity to establish networks. Also, Catalyst organizes webinars with diverse topics, which can help participants obtain diverse knowledge.

Last, NPOs can not only supply services for women in workplaces but can supply services for scholars in gender studies. For instance, Catalyst conducts large-scale field research on gender topics, offering valuable information sources to scholars. Hence, Catalyst can assist scholars in conducting a thorough analysis of gender issues, and then it can contact the academic community to work together to solve the imbalance between men and women in leadership positions.

4.3.4 Strengthen the Publicity of Female Role Models and Male Participation

First, NPOs ought to strengthen the publicity of the female leaders in careers, so other women can gain motivation and confidence from these role models, and the promotion of these role models can break society's stereotypes of leaders to a certain extent. Catalyst has researched female CEOs of S&P 500 and Fortune 500 companies and published their personal development history on the official website, and it will update the personal profile information of these CEOs. Additionally, Catalyst supplies consulting services, and women can communicate with advisors by filling in personal information and making an appointment. These advisors graduate from famous universities and have rich work and leadership experience, which indicates that through counseling services, women can obtain spiritual encouragement, acquire social resources, and establish networks based on the strong tie.

Second, NPOs need to call on men to promote gender equality in career advancement. Men's perception of women's power and acceptance of female work partners can eliminate the phenomenon of "old boys' club" in workplaces, which refers that men dominate leadership positions and exclude female collaborators [9]. Furthermore, in families, men's respect for women can encourage them to realize the significance of sharing

housework, so women will have the energy and time to devote themselves to their careers and strive for promotion. Catalyst initiated the MARC program that emphasizes and promotes the cooperation between different genders in workplaces, but this program overlooks the importance of sharing housework and childcare within families.

4.3.5 Expand Cooperation

The core assumption of the resource dependence theory remains that organizations need to survive by acquiring resources in surrounding environments [27]. Resource dependence theory contains the following two valuable assumptions for NPOs seeking equal cooperation: to survive, organizations need resources, and organizations themselves cannot produce these resources; organizations must interact with factors in environments on which they depend, and these factors include other organizations [27]. Therefore, NPOs can access development resources through cooperation with the outside world, to improve their capacities to solve social problems.

The cooperation between NPOs and other organizations includes cooperation with the governments, companies, and other NPOs. Catalyst obtains funds for organizing activities and conducting research through collaborations with companies. So far, Catalyst has received 28 million dollars in donations through Chevron, Pfizer, Procter & Gamble, and other companies. Also, Catalyst gains intellectual support from two consulting companies: Inclusion Partners and MARA Consulting, so Catalyst can ensure their strategic plans and career development plans for women are reasonable and effective. In addition, Catalyst collaborates with other NPOs to expand its influence and raise the efficiency of solving the global issue of gender inequality in career advancement. Catalyst has reached a partnership with the United Nations to promote gender equality in workplaces. However, Catalyst lacks liaison with governments, thus indicating that it should consider developing a cooperative relationship with governments to build a policy network that can overcome gender inequality in career advancement.

5. CONCLUSION

The paper proposes that the proportion of women in senior positions remains low because they spend time and energy in Childcare, face stereotypes from society, and lack high-quality and diversified social networks and social resources. It also proves obvious that women occupying senior positions can promote the diversification of leadership styles, improve organizational performance, encourage women to form a sense of social identity, and help women establish solid and diverse social networks. Therefore, assisting women

in obtaining authority positions in workplaces becomes a critical aspect of improving women's social status and achieving gender equality.

Additionally, as a powerful social force, NPOs should play an active role in solving social problems, so this paper explores what can NPOs do to overcome gender inequality in career advancement. This paper takes Catalyst as an example to conclude that NPOs can assist women in becoming leaders in the workplace by promoting the improvement of policies, supervising governments and companies, providing services to women and researchers, strengthening the publicity of female role models and male participation, and expanding cooperation. However, this research only selected Catalyst as a case study, so the results may not be universal. Also, this research lacks verification of the effectiveness of the measures taken by NPOs. Consequently, in the future, to verify the effectiveness of these measures and propose corresponding improvement schemes, related studies should include more NPOs that support women's rights in the research to do quantitative analysis.

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