Facilitators of Women’s Career Advancement in Public Service: A Study in A Developing Country

I. Abdul Ghani Azmi, S. H. Syed Ismail, and S. A. Basir, Member, IACSIT

Abstract—This paper aims to identify facilitators of career advancement in Malaysian federal service especially as perceived by the Muslim women. From purposive sampling technique on eight federal ministries, 241 questionnaires were distributed and 103 questionnaires were returned and usable whereby the rate of response was 43 percent. These women strongly agreed that the facilitators towards their career advancement were advice from immediate boss, education, perform abilities, commitment and dedication and seniority. They also agreed that current policies such as the same assignments and equal opportunities to further studies and pay as men facilitate towards their career advancement. Furthermore, their religion does not prohibit them to be leaders of men and they are treated equally as men in terms of respect and authority. This study also found that these women put their family as priority. Thus, the public organizations need to entice them in order to lure them to work hard in their career advancement by providing more facilities such as child care, longer maternity leave, flexible working hours, work at home or job sharing and reducing travelling time and geographical relocation.

Index Terms—Career advancement, facilitators, women, public service, Malaysia.

I. INTRODUCTION

Women constitute nearly half of the world’s population. They also comprise half of the workforce. Their contribution is important for the development of their country. However, they work just to supplement their family’s income. This is due to their major role is to look after their family. Thus, women need facilitators in order to lure them to contribute to the workforce. The developing countries also feel the need for the women’s contribution to their economy, especially Malaysia to no exception where majority is Muslim. Women start to work in Malaysian public-service in the year of 1903 [1]. However, in Islam, women’s contribution to society is secondary to men. Thus, what are the facilitators of these Muslim women especially in Malaysian federal public service? This paper will try to answer this.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Why Women Work?

There are so many reasons why women work. First and foremost is to supplement their family’s income especially when their husbands are sick and cannot work or when the income is not sufficient to support the whole family [2]. It is also could be due to the satisfaction that the women are seeking out of their formal education that they have. Furthermore, their working parents could also influence them to work.

Some rules and regulations such as The Equal Pay Act, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, and Executive Orders laid the foundation for affirmative action and equal employment opportunity for women [3]. Due to this, the number of women working increases [4].

B. Definition of Career Advancement

Newman in 1993 defined career advancement as the consequences of human capital, socio-psychological and systemic factors [5]. It is an objective measure of being successful in one’s own career.

C. Human Capital Factors

The human capital factors are the investment in one’s future. Newman (1993) identified these factors as advanced education, training, experience, continuous full time employment and overall effort such as ability, hard work, perseverance, determination and luck.

Women are working longer hours than their male counterparts. Women have to work harder and smarter to attain the same level that men sometimes attain with less effort. Kanter (1977) found that almost a quarter of the women spend more than 61 hours a week at work (24 percent) compared to only 10 percent of the men. It appears that women are making more sacrifices than men for career advancement in terms of time spent on the job and, by implication, away from the home. This is because women perceive a need to work harder and outperform their male colleagues to succeed. Keeton (1996) called this as the queen bee syndrome whereby they have to perform extra work several times a week to every day. 55 percent women compared to 9 percent men agreed that a woman had to perform better than a man to be promoted. A closer examination of the data reveals that women tend to be promoted at a slower pace than men for the first five to six years of their employment, and then their rate of promotion speeds up to the point that it exceeds the rate for men, as if women must work longer to “prove themselves” before they are accorded the same advancement opportunities as men [7]. Thus, hard work and determination would be the other reasons to accelerate the path toward success [6].

Moreover, human capital economists hypothesized that workers’ skill levels increase over their careers but at a decreasing rate. This is because workers invest in early skill enhancement more heavily than late in their careers [8].

Furthermore, Olson and Pringle (2004) highlighted on the

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