

FEMALES AT STRATEGIC LEVEL AFFECTING LOGISTICS FIRMS' COMPETITIVENESS: QUALITATIVE COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF CONTRASTING GENDER IN PAKISTAN AND CANADA

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ABSTRACT

Post-World War II, a significant growth in the representation of females in the workforce emerged, reflecting the significance of the female workforce in the present era. This qualitative research explores distinctive factors associated with female representation at the top levels of cargo logistics firms affecting overall competitiveness and performance in Pakistan and Canada. Earlier research has been of a single dimension and quantitative to a large extent, whereas this study undertakes a multivariate stance by considering leadership style, economies, and gender diversity in a qualitative manner, using networking, connections, and snowball sampling semi-structured interviews conducted with employees at all three levels of management. After a combined 91 (31=strategic level, 28=middle level, and 32=operational level) interviews, we reached the saturation point from which to draw a logical conclusion. The findings revealed that higher female representation at the top levels enhances innovation and the competitiveness of the firms. Gender diversity improves operational efficiency and performance. Males showed a higher preference for structured leadership, while females preferred flexible leadership. Interestingly, females in emerging economies have a higher chance of career advancement. Males are task-oriented and therefore demonstrated a preference for autonomy, while females are people-oriented, and thus showed creativity and concern for others. The original contribution of this study is that it enhances the body of knowledge by offering a qualitative in-depth understanding of the relationship between variables from a multi-dimensional perspective, namely gender, management levels and economies of interest, within one research framework.

KEY WORDS

Creativity and innovation, female representation, firm's competitiveness, gender diversity, leadership style, contrasting economies.

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Introduction

A plethora of literature has confirmed that, in developed economies, there is a significant relationship between female representation at the top level of management and the firm's overall competitiveness (Ely and Meyerson, 2000; Van Knippenberg et al., 2004; Dezsö and Ross, 2012; Palmquist, 2014; Haque et al., 2017). However, there is limited evidence from emerging economies or comparative qualitative analysis to measure the relationship. Thus, this research aims to examine the variables of interest in the qualitative manner by exploring the research phenomenon in a comparative way, focusing on the contrasting economies. Interestingly, Kot et al. (2016) argued that significant growth has been visible in recent times among the female workforce in new ventures and business sectors. On the other hand, Faizan and Haque (2016) found that, in emerging economies, females have certain limitations on their ability to work due to social and societal attributes. A wide range of research has revealed that organisational performance and overall competitiveness depends on the functionality of strategic management (Carpenter et al., 2004; Van Knippenberg et al., 2004; Daily et al., 2009; Dezsö and Ross, 2012). Nevertheless, only a limited number of studies have focused on female representation at strategic level in relation to the performance and competitiveness of the business (Carpenter et al., 2004).

Additionally, limited evidence showed the impact of strategic level gender diversity on the firm's competitiveness (Butterfield and Grinnell, 1999; Carpenter et al., 2004; Dezsö and Ross, 2012). Interestingly, out of the limited number of studies conducted to date, a positive correlation between female representation at top levels and overall performance has been confirmed

(Dezsö and Ross, 2012). However, the factors identified in these distinctive studies remain general, whereas no conclusive evidence is available to confirm which factor plays the most prominent role. Interestingly, from the literature at hand, autonomy (Dezsö and Ross, 2012), gender diversity (Klein and Harrison, 2007), and style of leadership (Ely and Meyerson, 2000) are vital factors affecting the relationship between variables of interest. Moreover, previous studies have largely taken a quantitative approach and considered specific economies, whereas this study fills the gap by considering comparative analysis in terms of economies of interest and explores the qualitative perspective. Hence, this paper attempts to fill the gap in the literature by means of robust methodology.

According to the World Economic Reform (2012), emerging economies have a lower human development index (HDI) whereas countries with a higher HDI are regarded as developed economies. Interestingly, the two contrasting economies considered in this study are Pakistan (an emerging economy) and Canada (a developed economy) due to the fact that, although there is a difference in terms of HDI, the subjective norms and existing features for slow female progression to top-level management are similar to a large extent. Females face similar constraints in both countries' cargo logistics sector. Furthermore, the presence of females at strategic level and cultural awareness are broadly similar in both countries, therefore these two economies are considered for investigating variables of interest. The study is significant because previous studies were longitudinal, explanatory, and region-specific, while this study takes a cross-sectional, comparative, and exploratory approach in order to investigate variables of

interest in a qualitative manner. Previously the focus was on numeric significance, whereas this study explains the research phenomenon qualitatively. In other words, previous studies focused on 'factual truth' (expressing the relationship numerically through mathematical objectivity) while the focus of this study is on 'useful truth', reflecting the understanding of the research phenomenon by testing truth through its practical applications.

The present study aims to examine the impact of contextual factors interlinked with female representation at strategic level on the overall performance and competitiveness of cargo logistics firms in distinctive economies. The research objectives are:

- to investigate the relationship between variables of interest in a qualitative manner,
- to examine contextual factors including autonomy, gender diversity, and leadership style which affect the performance and competitiveness of cargo logistics firms in Pakistan and Canada,
- to explore and evaluate the research variables, specifically considering the nature of the relationship in contrasting economies.

1. Literature review

1.1. Feminine leadership

A number of research papers have found that female leaders often tend towards a participative and democratic style of leadership (Dezsö and Ross, 2012; Chaluvadi, 2015; Pletzer et al., 2015). Interestingly, studies confirmed that males have a more autocratic and masculine style whereas females exhibit a collaborative and feminine style of leadership in organisational settings (Eagly and Johnson, 1990; Shipman and Kay, 2009; Merchant, 2012; Dezsö and Ross, 2012; Chaluvadi, 2015; Pletzer et al., 2015). Ely and Meyerson (2000) found an

equally positive impact of feminine leadership at all levels of management, especially enhancing employee performance, whereas Daily et al. (2003) argued that top team performance and the strategic approach of the firm improves due to a feminine leadership style. Specifically, if there is a higher representation of females in the top tier then employees at operational level perform well. Furthermore, Kanter (1988) and later Van Knippenberg et al. (2004) stated that organisational performance is significantly affected due to diversification and the feminine leadership style at strategic level. In addition, Zhang and Bartol (2010) argued that there is a positive correlation between organisational performance and leadership style. On the other hand, Larson et al. (1998) consider the correlation to be weak and insignificant to a large extent. Hence, from the abovementioned arguments, it can be determined that there is no conclusive evidence regarding the nature of the relationship between leadership style and the overall performance of organisations. Moreover, narrowing down the research variables reveals that there is still limited evidence regarding the feminine leadership style in relation to competitiveness. In other words, neither a positive nor negative relationship can be confirmed from the previous empirical studies.

1.2. Gender diversification

A large number of researchers have confirmed that individual and organisational performances are significantly affected by gender diversity (Tsui et al., 1991; Dezsö and Ross, 2012; Haque and Aston, 2016; Faizan et al., 2018). Nevertheless, adequate representation of males at strategic level has a relatively lesser effect on improving organisational performance at operational level but significantly improves the overall competitiveness of the firms in a broader sense (Phillips and Lloyds,

2006). In addition, the study by Tsui et al. (1991) showed that there is a weak negative relationship between the competitiveness of organisations and gender diversification. Thus, this indicates that there is no significant relationship. Conversely, Wiersema and Bantel (1992) found that gender diversification not only improves decision-making but also overall organisational performance and competitiveness. Furthermore, organisational effectiveness is positively affected by gender diversity at the strategic level (Klein and Harrison, 2007; Dezsö, and Ross, 2012; Haque et al., 2017). From the aforementioned arguments, there is no conclusive evidence at present as to the nature of the relationship between variables of interest. In addition, previous studies have only explored the research phenomenon in specific types of economy, while there is a need for comparative analysis in order to increase the generalisation of the findings.

1.3. Team task performance

Interestingly, a number of researchers have revealed that the task performance of the top tier is significantly influenced by gender diversity (Tsui et al., 1991; Dezsö & Ross, 2012; Haque et al., 2016; Haque et al., 2017). In addition, empirical research by Noe (1988) and Ibarra (1993) found that although females contribute significantly towards high-quality task performance, they still do not progress easily from the middle tier to strategic level. In other words, females find it relatively difficult to progress to the top of the hierarchy, despite the significant contribution which they make to performance. On the other hand, there is evidence from researchers that task performance, expertise and experience enable females to advance from the middle level to the strategic level (Hurley and Sonnenfeld, 1998; Eagly et al., 2003). Nevertheless, Daily et al. (2003), Bilimoria (2006)

and Faizan and Haque (2016) consistently found cultural and social barriers to female progress within the corporate hierarchy. Hence, there is still no conclusive evidence from the literature at hand concerning the relationship of variables of interest in contrasting economies. The variables of interest still require comprehensive exploration in the qualitative dimension.

1.4. Innovation and autonomy

The overall competitiveness and performance of the organisation is positively affected by the innovativeness and autonomy of managers at distinctive levels of management (Castanias and Helfat, 2001; Dezsö and Ross, 2012; Haque et al., 2017). Interestingly, motivation results from the significant links between autonomy and innovation (Castanias and Helfat, 2001), whereas Oldham and Cummings (1996) argued that motivation results from the interconnection between creativity and autonomy. Nevertheless, in terms of the management level, females at operational level have a greater positive impact on firms' competitiveness (Dezsö and Ross, 2012). Females at the strategic level make a limited impact in terms of autonomy towards organisational performance (ibid). Interestingly, a large number of researchers have concluded that attributes of autonomy such as creativity, self-actualisation, and self-awareness among female workers impact organisational commitment and motivation, irrespective of the functionality on the levels of management (Pittman et al., 1980; Dezsö and Ross, 2012; Haque and Aston, 2016). In addition, the abovementioned researchers found that the competitiveness of the firm has significant links to female motivation, driven by the performance and competitiveness of the organisation's autonomy. Studies have shown that autonomy and innovation are linked to the competitiveness and performance of the

organisations, but there remains a need for further exploration of the research phenomenon in distinctive economies, specifically in the qualitative dimension.

2. Research methodology

According to Creswell (2013), the unforeseen aspects are explored in the comparative manner through qualitative research, the main aim of which is to attain a deeper understanding of the variables. In this study, we combined probability and non-probability sampling techniques by considering stratified sampling for the selection of the organisations and convenience, snowball, and purposive sampling to reach participants working within the organisational setting at distinctive levels of management in both Pakistan and Canada. Using the stratified technique, the firms were chosen from the official list of mid-range cargo logistics firms in both countries. However, for the selection of participants, we combined networking, connections, and snowball sampling techniques. Using semi-structured interview questions, we approached different employees working at operational, middle, and strategic level in both countries. We conducted 91 interviews with the participants both face-to-face and via Skype, out of which 45 were from Canada and 46 from Pakistan. In total, 31 employees at strategic level (16 from Pakistan and 15 from Canada), 28 at middle level (14 each from Pakistan and Canada), and 32 employees at operational level (16 each from Pakistan and Canada) were selected for this study. We endeavoured to maintain an equal number of respondents as part of equal distribution.

Interestingly, the response rate of the organisations' participation was 39.2%. Morse (2006) argued that between 30-to-50 interviews with different types of employees could be effective in the determination of the saturation point. It means that no

new or indifferent response was obtained after attaining a certain number of responses. According to Francis et al. (2010), the benchmark for theoretical saturation is a minimum of 10 responses while three similar responses are sufficient to reach a conclusion. In this study, we obtained the total saturation point after 91 interviews, as the study is comparative; therefore, after 41 responses from Canada, we had reached the saturation point, while in the case of Pakistan it came after 30 responses, but for the purpose of fair and equal representation we continued to have an equal stance in terms of different dimensions. Hence, the 'saturation point' enabled us to draw logical conclusions. Furthermore, by using purposive sampling we ensured that equal representation was obtained in terms of the economies of interest, therefore a total of 45 responses from Canada and 46 from Pakistan reflected almost 50% from each economy. Formal consent from the HR departments of the targeted organisations was obtained via email, containing details regarding the purpose of the research, the sample interview instrument, approximate times, interview days and timing, and assurances of the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants. An HR officer was asked to arrange interview sessions, both face-to-face and via Skype, after formulating an introductory email to employees in order to seek voluntary participation. We used the networking connection strategy to reach participants within the organisations, as in each targeted organisation we had a 'point-of-contact' or gatekeepers to facilitate the data collection process. On average, interviews lasted between five and nine minutes. All participants were informed about the academic purpose of the research and their non-monetary participation. They were also informed about the option to leave the interview session if they felt like doing so.

Research followed an interpretive philosophy with an inductive approach. Managerial literature over the last five decades included in this study reflects the axiological view. In addition, we used the 'socio-anthropological' research paradigm with an objective epistemological stance, a critical realism ontological stance, and qualitative research methodology. The themes were refined because of the five interviews conducted in the randomly selected cargo logistics firm in the UK under a pilot study. It also enabled us to improve the sequential flow and structure of the interview process. Attride-Stirling (2001) proposed a 'thematic network framework' for systematic data analysis, which enables researchers to split verbatim data into meaningful and manageable portions. Hence, we followed the same thematic analysis by developing codes, themes, frequencies, and lastly generating proportions to explain the relationship through proportional analysis using the MS

Excel 2013 integrated package. We followed Haque and Aston's (2016) 'funnel approach' to exploring the research phenomenon. Manually written interviews were checked twice when data was entered in the Excel sheet as part of verbatim transcription.

As part of ethical considerations in this study, we used the triangulation approach by considering 'demographic variables' for checking and verifying the randomly picked participants' background for authenticity and credibility. This is an effective technique in facilitating the inclusion of the right type of participants with substantial experience, skills, and knowledge related to logistics operations. Moreover, 'test-retest reliability' was considered because we used the research questions that had previously been used in a similar setting, hence increasing the reliability aspect. We ensured the research instrument and process remained reliable, valid, and credible at all stages.

3. Findings and discussion

Table 1. Demographic information

Gender	Pakistan		Canada		Overall	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
	46.8%	53.2%	51%	49%	49.45%	50.55%
Age	Late 20s to early 30s		Mid-30s to mid-40s		30s-to-40s	
	41.2%		37.5%		39.41%	
Experience	1-3 years		5-to-7 years		3-to-5 years	
	36.7%		42.8%		38.2%	

Source: Own elaboration.

In this study, we had an approximately equal male-to-female ratio overall (49.45% to 50.55%). However, in-depth analysis showed that, in terms of gender, Pakistani organisations had a higher female-to-male ratio (53.2% to 46.8%) whereas Canadian organisations had more males than females (51% to 49%). Under the DAB (demographic-attitudinal-behavioural) formula, we began with demographic questions. The majority of the sample were aged be-

tween 30-to-40 (39.41%) but the comparison showed that the Pakistani workforce is relatively younger, mostly in their late 20s or early 30s, whereas the Canadian workforce was more mature, aged between mid-30s to mid-40s. Interestingly, in both countries, the majority of the participants were graduates with three to five years' experience on average (38.2%).

Table 2. A comparison of gender at various levels of management in Pakistan and Canada

	Pakistan		Canada		Overall	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Strategic Level	56.8%	43.2%	71.4%	22.6%	67.1%	32.9%
Middle Level	52%	48%	69.2%	30.8%	59.1%	48.9%
Operational Level	59%	41%	54.5%	45.5%	31.7%	68.3%

Source: Own elaboration.

Interestingly, the funnel approach and proportional analysis revealed that a higher number of males worked at top management level in Canada, while females with even less experience were employed at the top level in Pakistan. Females at strategic level in Pakistan were more prevalent than in Canada (43.2% to 22.6%), however in terms of gender, male representation

was significantly higher than female representation overall (67.1% to 32.9%). Similarly, females were found more frequently at middle and operational level in Pakistan than Canada. On the other hand, males' overall representation in contrast to their counterparts is higher at the operational and middle levels of management (59.1% and 31.7%).

Table 3. Preference for feminine leadership style at different management levels

	Male		Female	
	Feminine	Masculine	Feminine	Masculine
Strategic Level	47.6%	52.4%	73.2%	26.8%
Middle Level	62.1%	37.9%	53.5%	46.5%
Operational Level	35.7%	64.3%	54.2%	45.8%

Source: Own elaboration.

Through probing attitudinal and behavioural questions, we found that, in contrast to males, females working at the top of the corporate hierarchy have a greater preference for feminine leadership (73.2% to 47.6%). Furthermore, at operational level, the majority of females use and prefer feminine leadership in comparison to their counterparts (54.2% to 35.7%). Interestingly, females have a lower preference for and usage of feminine leadership in contrast to males at middle level (53.5% to 62.1%). Nevertheless, at the top of the corporate hierarchy, a greater preference for the feminine leadership style exists; therefore, our findings are aligned with the work of Dezsö and Ross (2012). The proportional analysis based on interview findings showed that, under a feminine leadership style, the performances of employees at all levels and

the competitiveness of the organisations improved. It is evident that, to a certain extent, even males prefer to work under a feminine leadership style; thus our findings support the earlier work of Merchant (2012) and Chaluvadi (2015). On the other hand, the present findings differ from the study of Daily et al. (2003) who posited that task performances improve only due to a female leadership style at the top levels of management, as our investigation showed that top-team task performances could improve under a masculine leadership style.

Table 4. Gender diversification preference at various levels of management

	Gender Diversification	
	Male	Female
Strategic Level	39%	75%
Middle Level	67.2%	66.8%
Operational Level	57.3%	81.5%

Source: Own elaboration.

In terms of gender diversification, females scored significantly higher than males at strategic level (75% to 39%). There is no significant difference evident at the middle level, but at the operational level, males have a greater preference for gender diversification (81.5% to 57.3%). Nevertheless, females scored higher than males overall. Hence, we confirmed the argument of Dezsö and Ross (2012) because it is evident that gender diversification leads to improved individual and organisational performances.

Table 5. Important aspects in terms of gender at strategic level

	Male	Female
Working efficiency and organisational performance improve due to female leadership at strategic level	66.4%	56.2%
Performance improves due to female representation at strategic level	69.7%	53.4%
Preference for task performance at strategic level	87.2%	41.7%

Source: Own elaboration.

To a greater extent, our findings support the earlier findings of Dezsö and Ross (2012) and Ely and Meyerson (2003) because we found that working efficiency and organisational performance improve substantially due to female leadership and representation in the corporate hierarchy (66.4% and 56.2%). Considering the types of economies, Canadian organisations scored higher than Pakistani organisations at all three levels of management (55.3% to 44.7%). Additionally, our funnel approach found that both males and females' per-

formances improve due to higher female representation at strategic level (69.7% and 53.4%); hence we support the previous work of Philips and Lloyds (2006) in this regard. In addition to that, at the top level, both males and females have a greater preference for improving task performance through innovation, involvement, and collaboration (87.2% and 41.7%). Nevertheless, middle level female managers have exhibited a higher preference than males (73% to 67.2%) and, consistently, females scored higher than counterparts (74.5% against 64.7%) at operational level. Therefore, indirectly, the present findings have a striking resemblance with the study by Eagly et al. (2003) which revealed that middle level females demonstrate a higher preference for task performance, which increases their chances of progressing to the strategic level.

Table 6. Use of autonomy for competitiveness at various management levels

	Autonomy	
	Male	Female
Strategic Level	88%	41%
Middle Level	61%	46%
Operational Level	51.3%	28%

Source: Own elaboration.

Exploring the issue of autonomy in relation to firms' competitiveness showed that, in contrast to females, males scored higher at all levels of management when it came to indicating a preference for autonomy at strategic level (88% to 41%), middle level (61% to 46%) and operational level (51.3% to 28%) respectively. Hence, our findings have a striking difference to the work of Dezsö and Ross (2012) and Castanias and Helfat (2001) which concluded that individual and organisational performance is positively influenced by autonomy at all three levels of management. We found that autonomy is not highly preferred by females, however females still play a sig-

nificant role in improving performance and competitiveness with a low preference for the use of autonomy in decision-making. Our study contradicts the findings of Dezsö and Ross (2012) as we found that the female workforce significantly contributes to

the competitiveness of the firm irrespective of the lower preference for autonomy at operational and middle levels. In addition, the Pakistani female workforce has higher preference for autonomy than their Canadian counterparts (48.1% to 23.8%).

Table 7. Preferred orientation and leadership style at strategic level

	Male		Female	
	Task orientation	People orientation	Task orientation	People orientation
Strategic Level	71%	28%	14%	63%
	Structured Leadership style	Flexible Leadership style	Structured Leadership style	Flexible Leadership style
	74%	26%	36%	64%

Source: Own elaboration.

Interestingly, we found that males have a greater preference for and usage of 'task-orientation' at strategic level in contrast to females at the top (71% against 14%) while females prefer 'people-orientation' (63% against 28%). In contrast to operational level, employees at middle level demonstrated a higher preference for flexibility and people orientation. Interestingly, females preferred a flexible leadership style overall, whereas males preferred a struc-

tured leadership style (74% to 64%). Therefore, our study supports previous empirical studies by Haque and Aston (2016), Dezsö and Ross (2012), Ibarra, (1993), Tsui et al. (1991), and Noe (1988) to some extent. Our findings contribute to enhancing the body of knowledge by offering qualitative confirmation of earlier findings. Interestingly, females have a more social orientation; therefore, this study somewhat supports the work of Jose, Zehra and Faizan (2018).

Table 8. Preference for orientation and leadership style in various economies

	Task orientation	People orientation	Structured leadership style	Flexible leadership style
Pakistan	78.3%	21.7%	79.7%	20.3%
Canada	38%	62%	32%	68%

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 9. Preference for orientation and leadership style by gender in various economies

	Pakistan		Canada	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
	Task orientation – Structured Leadership	People orientation – Flexible Leadership style	Task orientation – Structured Leadership	People orientation – Flexible Leadership style
Strategic Level	91%	81.3%	58%	64%
Middle Level	58.9%	56.2%	49%	75%
Operational Level	85.1	72%	53%	78%

Source: Own elaboration.

In terms of particular economies, we found that overall the Pakistani workforce has a greater preference for '*task orientation*' (78.3%) and '*structured leadership style*' (79.7%). In-depth analysis showed that Pakistani males scored higher for such preferences at strategic level (91%), middle level (58.9%) and operational level (85.1%). By contrast, Pakistani females preferred '*people-orientation*' and '*flexible leadership*' style at top level (81.3%), middle level (56.2%), and operational level (72%). On the other hand, the Canadian workforce demonstrated a higher preference for '*people orientation*' (62%) and a '*flexible leadership*' style (68%). Both Canadian males and females preferred people orientation and a flexible leadership style at strategic level (58% to 64%). At middle level and operational level, females scored higher than males in this aspect (75% to 49, and 78% to 53% respectively). This is a new finding which serves to increase the generalisation of the findings to distinctive types of economies.

The funnel approach revealed that gender diversification at strategic level improves the overall performance and increases the competitiveness of the organisations; thus, we support the findings of Dezsö and Ross (2012) as a positive relationship was established in this study, contradicting the argument of Tsui et al. (1991) that a negative weak relationship exists between variables of interest. Task performance causes significant positive variations in the competitiveness of the organisations. Additionally, autonomy was not the significant factor towards increasing competitiveness, especially considering the female representation at the top tier, as we found only 17.3% of variation was caused by autonomy in terms of attaining competitive advantage. However, there is positive linkage evident in Pakistan; but our findings confirm that, irrespective of

having autonomy, females can do better within the corporate hierarchy. Hence, our findings have striking differences with previous empirical studies (Wiersema and Bantel, 1992; Castanias and Helfat, 2001; Dezsö and Ross, 2012).

Conclusions and recommendations

Based on an in-depth qualitative analysis, we confirm that irrespective of the type of economy, female representation and a feminine style of leadership has a significant role in the enhancement of the overall performance and competitiveness of cargo logistics firms. We found that females play a pivotal role, enhancing the culture by bringing unique social and cultural norms and attributes. Males exhibited a more structured style while females demonstrated a flexible style of leadership. Pakistani organisations are less innovative, creative and progressive, while Canadian firms are more dynamic, creative, innovative, and progressive in terms of operations. The reason is a higher preference for autonomy in one type of economy over the other. In both distinctive economies, males preferred and showed a keen desire towards the use of autonomy at all layers of management, while females have no strong preference or desire for it. However, autonomy is not always the most significant factor in determining organisational performance and competitiveness. At strategic level, higher gender diversity leads to an improvement in the competitiveness and performance of organisations in both Pakistan and Canada. Interestingly, our results showed that females in Canada face higher constraints and difficulties in progressing higher in the corporate hierarchy, whereas in Pakistan progression to the top tier is much easier for females in comparison to males. Furthermore, males are highly task-oriented and preferred a structured

leadership style, whereas females are people-oriented and demonstrated a flexible leadership style. The results showed that males preferred autonomy over flexibility, while females preferred the opposite.

Based on our findings, we suggest that organisations should consider increasing the representation of females at the top tier, as female representation significantly improves the working efficiency and competitiveness of organisations in the cargo logistics sectors of both countries. In addition, cargo logistics firms should focus further on diversified top management, because higher diversification leads to a higher probability of attaining a competitive edge in the face of cutthroat competition. Additionally, creativity and innovation shall be promoted and encouraged at all management levels rather than limiting them to the operational level. The management of such organisations shall arrange frequent "Social Support Programmes" such as social events, informative workshops, special events, and so on, in order to convey that organisations care for their employees' career advancement and growth. This will further motivate employees to strive better towards their tasks and increase their chances to rise to the top level of management. Hence, there will be higher loyalty towards the organisation.

Recommendations for future research include exploration of the research phenomenon in different time lags. Perhaps a longitudinal design, especially a panel study, could improve results by offering more concrete and definite results. Future research should also consider the Delphi technique by conducting focus group interviews with experts from the industry. This will perhaps offer an in-depth exploration of the research phenomenon from an expert perspective. Future research should consider the use of a 'split strategy' by separating contractual and permanent

employees, because of the likelihood that experiences, views, and opinions may vary to some degree. Perhaps it can increase the generalisation of the findings if confirmed by both.

The present study provides a deeper understanding of the variables of interest as the explored research phenomenon will enable the managers to improve strategic functioning and decision-making. Moreover, it offers managers strategic moves for improving working efficiency and operational effectiveness. The increased level of female representation at the top tier will improve top team task performance and gender diversification, thus conveying the notion that the organisation believes in equality. In addition, females' soft skills could be effectively used by increasing their representation to enhance the quality of strategic management, as higher levels of people-orientation and flexibility could be effective in developing broader corporate policies. Finally, employee turnover could be reduced, as the study showed that higher levels of task performance increases employees' desire to stay with the same organisation. Therefore, the cost of hiring new employees could be significantly reduced through retaining productive employees by promoting them to the top tier.

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