

# Factors affecting females' participation in leadership positions in RMG industry, Bangladesh

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**Abstract-** This paper aims to examine the use of succession planning, flexibility and communication to ensure female participation in the leadership positions in the Ready Made Garments (RMG) industry of Bangladesh. Study used quantitative strategy and cross-sectional survey method to collect the data from 250 employees with education level of intermediate to masters. Results demonstrated that more than 90% of participants rated the level of succession planning, flexibility and communication used in RMG organisations as low to bring females into leadership positions. Since, no study identifying the use of three antecedents in Bangladesh has been conducted so far, significance of this study lies in highlighting the exact antecedents to be improved in RMG organizations of Bangladesh to increase female participation in leadership positions.

**Index Terms-** RMG, Succession Planning, Flexibility, Communication, Participants, Leadership

## I. INTRODUCTION

Participation of females in the workplace has been increased in recent years in poor and developing countries along with emerging and developed countries (EU, 2013; Saunders, 2016; BGMEA, 2017). They have been key workforces in many industries of different countries remarkably in Ready Made Garments (RMG) industry of Bangladesh where more than 85% workers are females. RMG industry has emerged as biggest earner of foreign currency for this developing country situated in the South Asia (Rahman, 2015; BGMEA, 2017). Due to increasing demands of garments worldwide and availability of cheap labor in Bangladesh, it has created ambitious target to earn more than \$50 billion by 2021 however the sector contributed more than \$26 billion in the year 2016 (BGMEA, 2017; Leahey, 2015; Daily Star, 2017). The industry employs 4.2 million workers in 2017 while majority of workers are females (BGMEA, 2017). In spite of contribution and number, the participation of females in leadership positions/managerial positions has consistency lower than men in this economically vital industry of Bangladesh.

According to WTO, the RMG sector might reach \$650 billion but it stands now \$483bn (Zamir, 2016). On the other hand, due to increase of labour costs in other major RMG producing countries such as Vietnam, Sri-Lanka, Mexico China, garments manufacturing companies have been shifting their factories into new locations such as Bangladesh, Pakistan, India etc (Schwab,

2017; Yunus and Yamagata, 2012; Deniel, 2017) BTT National Desk, 2015). Therefore, Bangladesh has reasonable chance to increase its exports to western and other buyers and even can gain its target by assigned period, 2021.

According to Tyagi, (2016) found that organizations with more women in the leadership roles perform better than organizations with fewer women in the leadership roles. It is supported from the research results of Mori and Towo (2017) and EU (2017) that the boards of director with women perform better and tends to gain high profitability and have positive impact on the female human resources. Additionally, similar view has been found from the research of Fitch and Agrawal, (2015) that female leaders in senior positions are more engaged than male leaders. Hence, these results urge that participation of females in leading roles in the organizations of Ready Made Garments (RMG) industry of Bangladesh would bring better organisational performance.

According to ILO (2015), presence of women in managerial positions in Bangladeshi business organizations is substantially low although a quiet revolution of women participation in workplace has been examined in recent years. The report of ILO in 2015 on women's representation in senior roles in Bangladeshi organizations published that only 5.4% positions in managerial roles are occupied by female counterparts (ILO, 2015). Mostly similar report is examined from Grant Thornton (2015) on females' presence in senior roles in South Asian Countries where women possess less than 15% senior roles. According to ILO (2015), it is necessary for Bangladeshi business organizations to discover what are the factors prohibiting females to be outnumbered in senior positions even though they have both qualification (Rahaman, et al., 2016) and experience (IMF, 2017; EU, 2014). If the organisations in the RMG industry and other industries succeed in employing higher numbers of women in the leading positions, it will be easy for them to gain higher productivity (Oakley, 2000; European Commission, 2014; Greer and Virick, 2008; Broughton and Miller, 2009; Aguirre et al, 2012).

Numerous studies have identified significant factors, which are needed to apply to increase numbers of female in leading positions such as motivation, flexibility, succession planning, communication, positive organisational culture, reducing patriarchy, fair salary and promotion, equality, health and safety, dignity etc (Zahidi and Ibarra, 2010; Sanderson and Whitehead, 2016; Hakim, Lumby, 2011; Whitehead, 2014; Ogunsanya, 2007). However, almost all of research works relating to the female participation in leading positions have been carried or tested in western countries and different organizational, industrial and cultural contexts.

However, no study so far, has been conducted to identify either the succession planning, flexibility, and communication are applied to ensure female participation in leadership positions in RMG organizations of Bangladesh or not. Therefore, this study aims to present the level of use of succession planning, flexibility and communication to increase female participation in the leadership position in selected industry only. Consequently, this study aims to help decision makers in RMG organizations and government bodies to develop robust and customised policies/strategies by knowing exact undiscovered antecedents for increasing female participation in leadership positions in the RMG industry.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 SUCCESSION PLANNING

According to Butler and Roche-Tarry (2002); Kowalewski et al., (2011), succession planning contributes companies to be ready for future critical vacancies of senior and middle management positions. Kim (2003); Karaevli, and Hall, (2003) and Berke (2005) defined the succession planning as the process through which an organisation ensures employees are developed or recruited regardless of their gender to fill each key role. It entails developing or making capable internal employees with potential to fill leadership positions when vacant (Kerr, 2004; SUFF, 2011; Groves, 2007).

According to Butler, & Roche-Tarry, (2002); Kowalewski, Moretti, and Denny, (2011) and Conlon, (2008); CIPD, (2016), effective succession planning facilitates the availability of capable and experienced employees to fill vacant leadership positions due to retirement of leading or managerial personnel in organizations. The success of succession planning is determined on the basis of the percentage of jobs e.g. senior positions or leadership positions filled by internal candidates (Busine and Watt, 2005; Charan, et al., 2001). In this respect, Hearing, (2016) and Greer and Virick (2008), defined succession planning, as it is the process of getting right people on board in the right roles.

According to CIPD (2016); Suff, (2011); Hirsh, (2000), succession planning ensures greater openness and diversity and closer links to wider talent management practices in the organisation regardless of gender issue. Barsh, et al., (2013) found, "When an organisation has a succession plan and it looks at current and future openings therefore to be fair with female, it needs to be intentional about how to place female in those roles.

In addition, there are number of studies, which have found that implementing succession planning in organizations can contribute to develop diversity and bring women at managerial positions according to their qualification and experience (Conger and Fulmer, 2003); Doyle-Morris, 2017; Barsh et al, 2013). In the most companies in western countries, the top personnel are encouraged to create relationships with potential future women leaders and to serve as their role models or sponsors to ensure right and effective succession in the vacant positions that might be evolved in future (Barsh, et al., (2013); PWC (2008); Blink, 2015). Realistically, IBM, a leading technology company announced a female as their new CEO that is considered a remarkable transition showing an example of world-class succession management for a female to access in leading position (Bersin, 2011). Kowalewski, et al., (2011) Greer and Virick (2008) suggested based on their research outcome that companies should have succession planning and apply it to promote women into top-level positions and cultivate diversity in leadership positions.

### 2.2 FLEXIBILITY

Wallen, (2002); Piterman (2008); Vandello et al, (2013) have found in their researches that poor flexibility in the working hours is responsible for loss of female talent from management. Muir and Hong, (2014) and Kelliher & Anderson, (2010) have demonstrated flexibility has a positive and powerful effect on women participation in workplace and their retention in long run in similar organisation. Flexibility encourages women to climb up since it not only creates opportunity to make effective balance in life but also offer potential leave rather than full time leave (Australian Institute of Management, 2012; Aguirre, et al, 2012; Adema, 2014). Many females leave their jobs due to family responsibilities and to educate and rear their children, therefore, they cannot access into the leadership positions even with both experience and potentiality (Saunders et al, 2016). According to Broughton and Miller, (2009) EU, (2014), if there were flexibility at workplace, women would not leave the organisation but could become encouraged to take leading roles spontaneously.

According to Pit-Catsoupes et al, (2009); Eaton (2003), and Schokley and Allen (2007) flexibility in the workplace allows both employees and employers to make working hours or arrangement according to their mutual conditions that suit them. It is also found that flexibility eases the process of creating work/life balance therefore women can engage in the workplace for long run maintaining all sorts of family and other responsibilities (Arbon, et al, 2009; Allen, 2009). As a result, long time experience of females makes them proficient to take roles in the senior positions (Piterman (2008). This is supported

by the findings from Kelliher & Anderson, (2010); Hellicar, (2013); Sanders et al, (2016) that flexibility boosts confidence and interest of women to take senior roles and serve for longer period in the organizations.

### 2.3 COMMUNICATION

According to Nobel and Birkinshaw (1998), communication is defined as the process of transfer of meaning between two or more people through different communication channels. The basic and most common modes of communication are written (e.g., emails, faxes, and letter), oral (e.g., discussions, meetings, phone call) and nonverbal (e.g., body language). The main functions of communication in the organizations include information diffusion, control, emotional expression and motivation (Tsai, 2006; Robbins and Judge, 2007).

An employee in leadership position has to take many decisions efficiently and even quickly that requires right information to make them effective and fruitful (Wright and Snell, 1999; Kreitz, 2007; Rausch et al., 2001; Roy, 2012). According to Harshman and Harshman (1999); Altinöz, (2008); Chen, (2008) communication plays significant role in collecting information from different sources to identify and evaluate alternative choices of certain issue to take right decision. Femi, (2014) have added that communication represents the values, choices, and beliefs of the leaders in the case of decision in the company and leading employees. Therefore, miscommunication would result in the week leading capability and internal and external problems and chaos (Hamm, 2016; Femi, 2014). In addition, organisational scandals could have occurred that is evidenced in the research of Seeger et al., (2003) identified lack of communication as one of the main causes for corporate scandals within organizations.

Effective communication skill to contact with different stakeholders (employees, suppliers, government agencies, competitors) has been identified as a main requirement for an employee to take leadership role in an organization (Herminia, Ely, and Kolb, 2013; Cheney, 2007). According to Halim and Razak (2014); Merchant, (2012); Chuang, (2013) regardless of the gender, the person, who like to access in the leadership position must attain effective communication skill to be successful in leading his or her employees and achieve organisational goals. In this regard, Barret, (2004); Patel, (2013) and Miller, (2017) have found that women without understanding the use of workplace communication strategies in the organisation, they cannot take leadership roles since it is foremost requirement for leaders to lead their followers in every sector. From this view, it is established that the communication is required for females in the organisation to access in the leadership positions.

### 3. HYPOTHESIS

In light of reviewed literature, found gap and objective of research, following hypotheses are proposed for investigation.

**Hypothesis 1:** There is succession planning to ensure female participation in leading position in the RMG organisations of Bangladesh.

**Hypothesis 2:** There is flexibility to ensure female participation in leading position in the RMG organisations of Bangladesh.

**Hypothesis 3.** There is communication for female participation in leading positions in the RMG organizations of Bangladesh.

## 4. METHODS

### 4.1 MEASURES

Questionnaires were used to collect the data for this study. The questionnaire was made up four sections: A, B, C and D. Section ‘A’ included on the socio-economic and demographic status of the respondents. Subsequently, the section ‘B’ included 6 items concerning the succession planning with regard to female participation in the leadership positions in the RMG industry. Section ‘C’ comprised 10 items on the flexibility with regard to female participation in the leadership positions in the RMG industry. The final section ‘D’ was made of 10 items on the communication with regard to female participation in the leadership positions in the RMG industry.

Different conditions given in the form of questions were measured on a 5-point semantic scale where 1 denoted “Succession planning or flexibility or communication are used to ensure participation of female in leadership positions” and 5 denoted “Succession planning or flexibility or communication are used to ensure participation of female in leadership positions”. Questionnaire measures employees’ response in terms of “Low”, “Moderate” and “High” to the existence of succession planning, communication and flexibility in the RMG organizations. The explanation of the scores low, moderate and high has been given in the following table:

Table 1: Explanation of the scores:

Use of Succession planning		
1-15 denotes	16-25 denotes	25-30 denotes
Low	Moderate	High
Use of Flexibility		
1-25 denotes	26-40 denotes	41-50 denotes
Low	Moderate	High
Use of Communication		
1-25 denotes	26-40 denotes	41-50 denotes
Low	Moderate	High

Twenty-six (26) questions were formed and adapted from an extensive literature review, from the work of (Pit-Catsouphe, et al., 2009; Forris, 2015; Harp, 2011; Rosenwald and Wendell, 2014). Accumulated mean scores of the six factors, independency and in a combined form can also be calculated to evaluate the use of succession planning, flexibility and communication to ensure women participation in leadership

positions. Higher the score, the more agreement respondent showed high use of those factors to ensure women participation in the leadership positions. This type of instrument has been used and validated by the different types of previous studies conducted in different cultures and the different contexts (i.e. see Rush et al, 1995, 1991; Nelson and Sutton, 1990; Forris, 2015; Harp, 2011). The questionnaire also includes information related to participants' demographics mentioned in table 3, section 5.2.

#### 4.2 SAMPLED POPULATION

Hemayetpur, Saver, Bangladesh was selected as the research backgrounds because it is one of the garment manufacturing hubs in the country (Daily Star, 2017). There are many big garment-manufacturing factories in this area exporting cloths to different western and other countries (BGMEA, 2017; BBC, 2017). The target population was the employees working in the different levels in different factories. Two hundred and fifty (250) employees with education level of Intermediate to Masters working in RMG organisations were randomly given the invitation with questionnaire to participate in this study. Only educated employees working in RMG organizations have been selected because educated people tend to climb up in higher positions in the organizations and potential to take leadership roles in complicated work environment.

#### 4.3 PRE-TESTING

The questionnaire was written in English and pre-tested on 10 employees working in the RMG organizations in Hemayetpur, Saver. All the participants were encouraged to ask questions as this facilitate amendments of the questionnaire if there were any difficulties to understand the questions. According to the participants in the pilot study, questions were comprehensible.

### 5. RESULT

#### 5.1 RELIABILITY

In order to see the reliability of the collected date, Cronbach's Alpha test was used. Cronbach's Alpha test showed a score of 0.79, 0.78, and 0.74, for role succession planning, flexibility and communication, respectively. Reliability score for complete instrument was 0.94. Since the obtained scores were relatively high and within the good range, thus showing high reliability of data for further analyses.

#### 5.2 RESPONDENTS' PROFILE

Table 3: Demographic table of respondents

Variables	Values	%
Age	Below 20	0
	21-30	48%
	31-40	38.4%
	41-above	13.6%
Gender	Male	16%
	Female	84%
Education	Intermediate	28%
	Undergraduate	60%

	Masters/MBA	12%
Experience	1-2 years	34%
	3 -5 years	27%
	6 -10 years	26%
	Above 10 years	15%

#### 5.3 USE OF SUCCESSION PLANNING, FLEXIBILITY AND COMMUNICATION

Table 4 shows that use of all 3 factors included in the survey is low in the RMG organizations to ensure females are in leadership positions.

In light of the study's objectives and the reviewed literature three hypotheses are developed and tested. First hypothesis states that there is succession planning to ensure female participation in leading position in the RMG organisations of Bangladesh. Since 98.2% participants, according to the survey results, have expressed lower use of succession planning in their organizations to ensure female participation in the leadership positions. Therefore, it can be concluded that the RMG organizations do not use succession planning in the organizations although it is a significant determinants to ensure females in leadership positions. Thus, first hypothesis can be rejected.

**Table: 4:** Frequencies, mean average and standard deviations of Use and level of Succession planning, flexibility and communication

Succession Planning				
Mean	Std. Deviation	Level of the use of Succession Planning		
		Low (6-15)	Moderate (16-24)	High (25-30)
11.34	1.677	98.2%	1.8%	0%
Flexibility				
Mean	Std. Deviation	Level of the use of Flexibility		
		Low (1-25)	Moderate (26-40)	High (41-50)
21.53	2.545	96.7%	1.90%	1.4%
Communication				
Mean	Std. Deviation	Level of the use of Communication		
		Low (1-25)	Moderate (26-40)	High (41-50)
21.69	2.354	94.4%	3.10%	97.5

\*Results are significant @ P<0.01

Second hypothesis undertakes that there is flexibility to ensure female participation in leading position in the RMG organisations of Bangladesh. Since, 96.7% participants voted that the use of the flexibility in the working processes or procedures in the RMG organizations is low therefore the second hypothesis



is rejected. Third hypothesis views that there is communication for female participation in leading positions in the RMG organizations of Bangladesh. According to the results obtained through this study, 94.4% respondents have opined that the use of communication to ensure females in leadership positions in RMG organizations is low. Consequently, this hypothesis is rejected.

## 6. DISCUSSION

The primary aim of the study was to identify the level of use of succession planning, flexibility and communications in the RMG organizations to ensure female participation in the leadership positions. Results of the study showed very low use of those factors in the RMG organizations. According to Axelrod, (2002), Australian Institute of Management (2012); Adema, (2014), it is difficult for females to climb up into the leadership or senior roles if there is not succession planning in the organizations. The result of the study finds there is no succession planning in the RMG organizations. Therefore we can say lower use of succession planning creates barriers for females to access in leadership positions in the selected industry. Mostly similar results (i.e. lower use of flexibility and communication) are identified in RMG organizations therefore the existence of the females in the leadership positions is dramatically. According to Eaton, (2003); Hofacker and Konig, (2013) flexibility at workplace contributes to create work-life balance, which is significant to ensure both family and work are maintained effectively. Since, females play vital role to execute household works and responsibilities therefore flexibility in the workplace can inspire them to take leadership roles (Pit-Catsouphe, et al, 2009; Shockley & Allen, 2007). Thus, absence of flexibility in workplace fundamentally creates barriers to climb up into senior roles. On the other hand, communication is urgent for every employee to take effective decision in leadership roles regardless of gender (Seeger et al, 2003; Tsai, 2006; Femi, 2014; Harp, 2011) but result found lower use of communication in RMG organizations. Therefore, lower use communication processes such as mobile phones; email is a significant barrier for employees specially for females to take leadership roles.

## 7. CONCLUSION

The main objective of the study was to identify the level of use of succession planning, flexibility, and communication to ensure female participation in leadership positions in RMG organizations in Bangladesh. On the whole, this study shows that the use of three antecedents is low in the RMG organizations. Therefore, in order to develop female participation in the leadership positions in the surveyed organizations, it is pertinent to increase the usage of the three antecedents. The organizations after knowing the lower use of the succession planning, flexibility, communication, as identified in this study can devise customised strategies to ensure increased female participation in the leadership positions to improve the organisational productivity and equality in the leading roles.

## 8. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study used only selected factors relating to the female participation in leadership positions. It was beyond the scope of the study to see all the significant factors, which used or not to increase numbers of females in leadership positions. Future researches can be undertaken by adding more factors. Link of cultural factors with the female participation in the leadership positions in the RMG organizations in the Bangladesh can also be investigated.

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