

Factors Influencing Female Employees' Empowerment: A SDGs Perspective

Sairan Hayama
Shukutoku University

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1. Introduction

The United Nations adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in September 2015 to not only address the issues faced by developing countries, but also to encompass global agenda that are integrated and indivisible, harmonizing economic, social and environmental sustainability. It comprises 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets (1). In order to implement the 2030 Agenda, Japanese government has set out a vision to be the champion of sustainable and resilient society in which “no one is left behind.” Also, Japan has selected eight priority areas to implement the 2030 Agenda since 2018 and the first area is empowerment of all people, including women's empowerment (2). Among the 17 goals, the goal 5 is to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, and the goal 8 is decent work and economic growth. We can say that women empowerment is one important area of SDGs.

2. Purpose of this research

In Japan, due to the decrease of young generation population and the aging problem in Japanese society, women now are expected to play economic roles besides their traditional housekeeping responsibilities. Female workers are regarded to be able to contribute to the solutions to huge social and medical insurance budgets, and thus women empowerment has become an important issue to Japanese companies and the government. However, Japanese women have been delayed in advancing to the society when compared with women in other developed countries. In October 2013, Japanese Personnel Department announced the ratio of female managers is only 2.6% in 21 prefectures, departments and offices in terms of managerial level (3). In order to improve this situation, the Japanese government has decided to increase the ratios of female managers to be 30% by 2020. But

how can Japanese companies and the government improve women's workplaces and encourage women to make commitment to their jobs without knowing women's motivation and attitudes toward work?

Currently, based on CSR, CSV and HRM perspectives and theories, including and supporting female employees has been regarded as an important SDGs issue in Japan in order to help women sustain their jobs. But how can women motivate themselves or how they are motivated to continue their career when they face difficulties in work-life balance. This research tried to analyze surveys conducted in Japan and Taiwan regarding women's perception and motivation toward their work and career. It was found that, compared with Taiwan, women in Japan are more negative about their career promotion and life-work balance and they are lowly motivated toward their work after getting married or having children due to the lack of support from their family. These factors have influenced female employees to make decision to withdraw from their workplaces.

Methodologically, the current research utilized a quantitative approach by conducting questionnaire surveys to female college students in Japan and Taiwan during 2011 to 2013. Based on this comparative research, the reasons and factors why Japanese female workers hesitate to continue their career can be examined and therefore, companies and the Japanese government can find more appropriate approaches to empower and support female workers.

3. Literature reviews regarding women empowerment: HRM, CSR and CSV

Effective HRM encourages the employees to do their best, which contributes to the overall success of the company and their work often involves rewarding employees for good performance and creating a positive work environment. Human resource management involves both strategic and comprehensive approaches to managing people, as well as workplace culture and environment. Based on the idea of HRM, we can see the importance of empowering female employees toward their jobs.

This paper adopts women support involvement as not only HRM but also CSR issues. Though there are various definitions about CSR, it is generally considered to encompass four main areas, which are the environment, the workplace, the community and the marketplace (Carroll,A.,1979&2003). Within these areas companies are making a difference by conducting specific

programs to respond to various social demands. Enterprises that treat the stakeholders, including female employees, with respect will eventually earn the trust of customers and their business partners.

The most advanced concept of CSR would be Creating Shared Value (CSV), a strategic CSR phase. Michael Porter and Mark Kramer (2011) have been arguing the concept of CSV which suggests corporations to integrate their CSR initiatives into their core corporate activities and objectives, in order to create new corporate strategic value. Companies nowadays see a great opportunity to create a new value through CSV, as it would differentiate it from other competitors.

These above literature reviews show that female employees' empowerment issue can be interpreted through CSR, CSV and HRM perspectives and it contributes to both economic value and social value.

4. Findings of the factors influencing women empowerment

The findings about Japanese women empowerment based on the survey data collected in Japan and Taiwan are as follows.

- (1) Only 30% Japanese female students replied to continue their jobs even they get married or have any children.
- (2) Only 35% Japanese female students chose to continue their jobs if they become financially rich while 83% Taiwanese female students will stay in their career even when they are financially blessed.
- (3) 66% Japanese female students replied that women are not equally promoted even they work hard. This results indicate that there are still some discriminative differences in Japanese companies, male and female workers are not equally treated.
- (4) 77% Japanese female students replied that it is difficult to attain life-work balance and overtime work is regarded to be an obstacle to women's career development.
- (5) It is difficult to return to the workplaces if Japanese women once quit, but Taiwanese female students were more positive about re-challenging toward the workplaces.

The article suggests that not only supportive policies and practices are needed to empower female employees but also the support to build women's strong will to overcome difficulties in their career life is needed.

Note:

- 1) <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>,
accessed on Oct. 2, 2019
- 2) Japan's eight priority areas are as follows.
(<https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/oda/sdgs/pdf/000252819.pdf>)
 - ① Empowerment of All People
 - ② Achievement of Good Health and Longevity Prosperity
 - ③ Creating Growth Markets, Revitalization of Rural Areas, and Promoting Science Technology and Innovation
 - ④ Sustainable and Resilient Land Use, Promoting Quality Infrastructure
 - ⑤ Energy Conservation, Renewable Energy, Climate Change Countermeasures, and Sound Material-Cycle
 - ⑥ Conservation of Environment, including Biodiversity, Forests and the Oceans
 - ⑦ Achieving Peaceful, Safe and Secure Societies
 - ⑧ Strengthening the Means and Frameworks for the Implementation of the SDGs.
- 3) Nihon Keizai Shinbun, 2013.12.18.

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