

Causal Attributions of Career Success Across Genders: A Perspective of Private Sector Organizations

Shazia Akhtar

Air University E-9, Islamabad, 44000, Pakistan

Abstract: The main purpose of this paper was to highlight the relationship between causal attributions of career success with gender in the private sector organizations. It has already been suggested in literature that there is a close linkage between gender and attribution made and indeed attribution assigned is dependent on gender and synergistically related. A specific objective of this paper was to assess the nature of this relationship. It was seen empirically that by manipulating the gender and success of managers what changes occurred in the attributions made. One main hypothesis and four sub-hypothesis were tested empirically. Two of the sub-hypothesis were accepted and two were rejected giving partial acceptance to the main hypothesis.

Key words: Career Success • External Attributions • Internal Attributions • Gender

INTRODUCTION

The present paper explored career success as research on career success benefits both people and organizations [1]. The success in career is believed to bring a sense of achievement and satisfaction to an individual. Individuals having similar qualification would be at different levels of success based on their performance at work. The analysis of who succeeds and how is very important and interesting as success in one's occupation improves people's quantity and quality of life. The interest of present paper was to discover the differences of gender in attributing career success, keeping in view the changing workforce trend where more women are taking on the managerial positions especially in private sector organizations as the number of women in management positions quadrupled in 1970s and 1980s [2].

Literature Review

Career Success: The term career success could be separated into two words, namely career and success, which have different meanings. According to Mondy *et al.* [3], career is a general course of action an individual chooses to pursue throughout his or her working life. Meanwhile, as stated by Sonali [4], success means the attainment of wealth and the accomplishment of desired aspirations. So, how would career success be defined? Many researchers [5-8] had generally defined career

success as the accumulation of positive achievement resulting from one's work experiences. Besides, career researchers [7-13] generally agreed that an individual career success could be divided into objective and subjective forms. However the focus of this research is the causal attribution of career success.

Causal Attribution: A causal attribution in this paper was conceptually defined as the necessity to explain the surroundings. While this structuring happens in all domains of life, researchers concentrate on causal attribution of achievement and failure because of its motivational importance for future behavior [14, 15]. As discussed earlier in the literature, the causal attribution can be classified in various dimensions like internal, external, stable and unstable [15]. However, in this study we were interested to know whether the effort was contributed to internal causes or to the external causes. The internal causes were ability, effort, mood, personality and cognition as they arise from within or are internal to the people, while difficulty of task, other people's assistance or resistance and luck were reasons conceived to be within the surroundings or to be external to the people.

Effect of Gender in Attribution Success: Weiner's [14,15] classification advised that reasons given for the achievement or failure of male and female can vary noticeably and are based on the sex-role orientations.

Attribution for the good efforts of male are expected to be bestowed to ability and skill (internal factors), while the good performance of females is expected to be assigned to good luck, comfort of task, or unusual effort [16]. On the other hand, a male's unsuccessful effort is attributed to bad luck, while a female effort is attributed to low ability.

The research of Davies and Netzley [17], while discussing what it required to reach the top, the males mainly attributed their achievement and high ranks to their personal traits (internal factors). Contrary to males, all of the females insisted that hard work alone, or even skill or intellect, were not sufficient to succeed and that chances (external factors) were frequently blocked to individuals who were not males [18]. All of the females insisted that environmental hindrances existed to hamper a hardworking female from attaining upward corporate mobility. In Rosenthal's [19] research, females who were in top ranks were more probable than males to interpret their achievements using external reasons and to accuse themselves for their failure.

These mixed results on gender deviation in the use of power, based on the past literature supported the argument of the present research to look at the gender difference in attributing success/failure to internal factors or external factors. Thus the following testable hypothesis and sub-hypotheses were formulated as follows:

H: Attribution Assigned Is a Function of the Interaction Between the Managers' Achievement and Managers' Sex:

H_a: Male's achievement is more likely to be attributed to internal reasons than a female's achievement.

H_b: Female's failure is more likely to be attributed to internal reasons than a male's failure.

H_c: Female's achievement is more likely to be attributed to external reasons than a male's achievement.

H_d: Male's failure is more likely to be attributed to external reasons than a female's failure.

Research Methodology

Respondents: The respondents/participants in this study were the individuals within chosen private organizations who had more than two years of work experience in that organization. A total of 200 research instruments were distributed by hand and through prime contacts who worked in the respective organizations and all were returned yielding a response rate of 100%. The information derived was used to answer the research

questions. Participation in this study was on purely a voluntary, anonymous and confidential basis and privacy was strictly guarded of the sensitivity of opinions, which were expressed about the superiors within the organization.

Measures: A questionnaire was used to measure the dependent variables causal attribution (Internal/external) for this research encompassing items that had been previously validated by researchers [15, 20, 21]. The questionnaire assessed the judgment of the participants about all the successful (unsuccessful) managers that they have ever worked with, or exposed to. In order to assess the causal attribution, participants were provided with a set of adjectives explaining various attributes that can be inferred about the success or failure of a person. Their job was to rate the manager in question on a 7-point scale, the 20 items in the questionnaire that they felt most probably attributed toward his or her career success or failure. The 20 self-constructed items were derived from various literatures, mainly by Weiner [14, 15], Benson [20] and Russell [22]. An illustration of these items is depicted below.

- How is his/her ability to manage his/ her task?
lowest ability 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
highest ability
 - How much of effort does he demonstrate in whatever he does?
lowest effort 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
highest effort
 - How confident is he
lowest confidence 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
highest confidence.
- 1 = Lowest;
2 = Lower;
3 = Low;
4 = Neutral,
5 = High,
6 = Higher,
7 = Highest

The 20 items selected for the instrument were given a random sequence. The distribution of the items and the sources are presented in the Table 1

The 14 items of the instrument used adjectives attributing to internal success of a person and the remaining 6 items used adjectives attributing to external success of the person.

Table 1: Distribution of Scale Items for Attribution

<i>Dimensions</i>	<i>No. of Items</i>	<i>Items Number</i>	<i>Sources</i>
Internal Attribution	14	1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20	Weiner (1974, 1983) Benson (2001) Russell (1982)
External Attribution	6	4, 9, 10, 11, 12, 15	Weiner (1974, 1983) Benson (2001)

Table 2: The Rotated Factors and Factor Loadings of Attribution

Items	Factors		
	1	2	3
1. Inner-Ability			
14. How capable is he/she in his/her job?	.77	.42	.15
16. How confident is he/she?	.74	.28	.40
17. How experienced is he/she in his/her job?	.81	.32	.20
18. How knowledgeable is he/she in doing his/her task?	.79	.37	.22
19. How qualified is he/she?	.67	.03	.33
20. How devoted is he/she toward his/her task?	.75	.35	.27
2. Inner-Appearance			
5. How is his/her personality?	.30	.81	.19
6. How is his/her temper?	.25	.79	.16
13. How pleasing is he/she?	.20	.61	.39
3. External- Factors			
9. How helpful is his/her life partner?	.25	.39	.66
10. How fortunate is he/she?	.22	.01	.80
11. How supportive are superiors towards him/her?	.33	.37	.62
12. How helpful is his/her family?	.24	.30	.77
Eigenvalue11	.691	.311	.07
Percentage of Variance	58.46	6.57	5.33

Note. $N = 400$; items are grouped for presentation purposes; the scale contained items in random order; underlined loadings indicate the inclusion of that item in the factor.

Data Analysis: The analysis of the data collected was carried out using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS- 12). To analyze the data the factor analysis, reliability analysis and Analysis of variance was used.

Factor Analysis of Attribution: The reason for doing factor analysis was to identify the structure of relationships among variables by analyzing the correlations between the variables and specifying a set of common underlying dimension, known as factors. It is such an interdependence method in which all variables are at the same time reasoned. To measure the degree of intercorrelations among the variables and the correctness of factor analysis, anti-image correlation matrix, Bartlett test of sphericity and Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of Sampling Adequacy were evaluated and verified. Evaluation of sampling adequacy was done and the diagonal entries of the anti-image correlation matrix that

varied from. 92 to .97 showed a high degree of sampling adequacy for each of the 20 items. Moreover, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of Sampling Adequacy was at .95 and the Bartlett test of sphericity suggested significance of overall correlations. These three indicators affirmed the rightness of the use of factor analysis for the 20-item measure for attributions of career success as the least acceptable values that indicated appropriateness of factor analysis for anti-image correlation and KMO are 50 and 60, respectively [23] Table 2 summarizes the factor loadings and cross factor loadings with other factors of the items that were extracted from the rotated component matrix.

Answers to the twenty items associated to internal and external locus of control of the study instrument were subjected to a varimax rotated principal components analysis. Three significant and interpretable factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.00 were drawn out that collectively explained a total of 70.36%

the variance. The factor loadings and cross loadings were analyzed employing the rotated components matrix. The preceding table 2 shows that within a factor, the criterion of item selection was based on factor loading greater than .50 and cross-loadings of less than .30. Nevertheless, it was somewhat relaxed for items with high factor loadings. A total of 13 substantial items were included in the final scale. The 7 items that were omitted had high cross loadings that were quite close to the factor loadings. The three extracted factors represented for a total of 13-item measure from the initial total of 20-item measure. These subscales were labeled “Inner-Ability,” “Inner-Appearance,” and “External- Factor. Moreover, the inter-correlations and descriptive statistics of the factors were calculated for all the factors within each domain to determine the level of independence.

Reliability Analysis: Next reliability analysis was performed to assess the degree of internal consistency amongst multiple measurements of a variable. This determined that the individual items of the scale were measuring the same construct. Cronbach’s coefficients alpha was calculated to estimate the reliability of the scale for each identified factor.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics, Cronbach's Coefficients Alpha and Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficients for Attribution.

Factors	1	2	3	4	5
1. Inner -Ability	.93				
2. Inner-Appearance	.65**	.83			
3. External- Factors	.65**	.57**	.83		
Mean	4.92	4.51	4.74	4.50	4.75
Standard Deviation	1.29	1.32	1.20	1.09	1.19

Note. N = 400; **p < .01; Diagonal underlined entries represent the Cronbach's coefficients alpha.

Table 4: A Brief Account of ANOVA: Inner-Ability as a function of Progress and Sex of Managers

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F
Managers' Progress (MP)	215.50	1	215.50	200.35**
Managers' Sex (MS)	2.69	1	2.69	2.50
MPX MS	11.34	1	11.34	10.54**
Error	421.63	392		
Total	662.94	399		

Note. *p is less than .05; **p is less than .01.

Table 5: A Brief account of ANOVA: Inner-Appearance as a Function of Progress and Sex of Managers

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F
Managers' Progress (MP)	165.33	1	165.33	127.59**
Managers' Sex (MS)	8.81	1	8.81	6.80*
MP X MS	1.25	1	1.25	0.97
Error	507.94	392		
Total	694.21	399		

Note. *p is less than .05; **p is less than .01.

Table 6: A Brief Account of ANOVA: External Factors as a Function of Progress and Sex of Managers

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F
Managers' Progress (MP)	140.33	1	140.33	129.88**
Managers' Sex (MS)	0.90	1	0.90	0.83
MP X MS	2.38	1	2.38	2.20
Error	422.44	391		
Total	572.96	398		

Note. *p < .05; **p < .01.

Inter-correlations and Analysis of Reliability for Attribution: The descriptive statistics, Cronbach's coefficients alpha and Pearson correlation coefficients (r value) for the dependent measures (3 factors for attribution) of career success are given in Table 3.

From the preceding table it can be seen that depending on the reliability coefficient that evaluates the consistency of the three subscales, the Cronbach's coefficient alpha value varied from .83 to .93. This reflects good internal consistency as the broadly

acceptable lower limit for Cronbach's alpha is .70 [23]. The extent of the Pearson correlation coefficients (r value) for attribution indicates meaningful inter-correlations among the three factors. The value varied from .57 to .65 with an average $r = .62$, this outcome depicts a moderate degree of inter-correlation among the factors but at an acceptable independence of scale. Since, inner-ability and inner-appearance that comprised the internal locus of control were conceptually close; they were closely tied with each other. Though these two factors are interrelated, the r value did not surpass the coefficients of alpha.

Hypothesis Testing: A univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) for each of the three factors derived from the factor analysis on attribution was performed in order to test the main hypothesis and the sub-hypothesis of the study. The hypotheses and the sub-hypothesis are as follows:

- H:** Attribution assigned is a function of the interaction between the managers' achievement and managers' sex.
- H_a:** Males' achievement is more likely to be attributed to internal reasons than a female's achievement.
- H_b:** Female's failure is more likely to be attributed to internal reasons than a male's failure.
- H_c:** Female's achievement is more likely to be attributed to external reasons than a male's achievement.
- H_d:** Male's failure is more likely to be attributed to external reasons than a female's failure.

The brief account of analysis of variance result for inner-ability is presented in Table 4.

The above table revealed a significant effect of managers progress ($p < .01$) and the interaction effect of managers progress with managers sex ($p < .01$). Therefore it can be said that managers' achievement and managers sex are significant for inner-ability. Therefore the sub-hypothesis H_c and H_d is not accepted by the data. The brief account of analysis of variance result for inner-appearance is presented in Table 5.

The above table revealed a significant effect of managers progress ($p < .01$) and also a significant effect of managers sex ($p < .05$). However the interaction effect of managers progress and managers sex is not significant for inner-appearance. Therefore the sub-hypothesis H_c and H_d are not accepted by the data. The brief account of analysis of variance result for external factors is presented in Table 6.

The above table revealed a significant effect of managers progress ($p < .01$). However the interaction effect of managers progress and managers sex is not significant for external factors. Therefore the sub-hypotheses H_c and H_d are not accepted by the data. Hypotheses 2 stated that attribution assigned is a function of the interaction between the managers' achievement and managers' sex. From Table 4, Table 5 and Table 6, it can be deduced that managers' achievement and managers' sex are meaningful for inner-ability but not for inner-appearance and external factors. Thus, sub-hypotheses H_c and H_d are not accepted by the data. The results indicate partial acceptance of the main hypothesis of the study.

DISCUSSION

This study has demonstrated empirical evidence and provided new and in some respects, interesting dimensions to the understanding of career success and the stereotypical assertions related to career success of males and females managers. Like the assertion of Judge and Bretz [8], that in order to excel in career, individuals have to improve the basic skills, cognition and potentials required to reach to the coveted ranks.

It is worthwhile to discuss that complete attribution of reasons for success and failure either to internal or an external factor was the exception rather than the rule. Most participants attributed the manager's success to combination of ability and luck. Even when a manager was believed to have a "lucky break" or to have been unlucky it was uncommon indeed for the participant to attribute success or failure completely to good or bad luck; the result is also seen as speculating some ability (or lack of it).

It is evident that irrespective of the sex of the manager, achievement was overall related with internal reasons. The results of this research were uniform with the findings of Benson [20], Levi and Stephanie [24] and Russell [22]. Inner-ability, such as competency, confidence, experience, cognition, qualification and loyalty explained the highest ratings of success amongst male and female managers in comparison to the least successful managers.

Inner-appearance, such as temperament, personality and attractiveness was also considered as a reason of achievement but to a small degree. In contrast to the previous research [15, 20] that regarded failure to external factors, the current research depicted that success was also rated highly to external factors such as luck, family support and assistance from powerful others. This result

was consistent to one of the previous study conducted by Rosenthal [19], in which females who were in top ranks interpreted their achievements using external reasons and accused themselves for their failure.

The present research clearly depicted that achievement in career by males and females were not explained by the same attribution. Consistent with information from other studies [19], the data from this research showed that sex differences were rather stable, as differences seemed to exist from a very early age and continue to high levels of management.

The relation between managers' achievement and managers' sex was meaningful for inner-ability ($p < .01$) but not for inner-appearance and external factors. This depicts that among male and female managers, inner-appearance and external factors were attributed equally. Interestingly, a key aspect may be the difference between laboratory studies [15] in which gender differences have more often been found and studies in actual work settings, where differences have less often been found.

One reasoning for this is that although powerful sexual stereotypes that decrease female performance may be commonplace, the stereotype is effectively reduced when more information is known about the person than is frequently provided in the laboratory environment. That is, in the business world, evaluators know much more details about an individual and the more information that is available, the less likely that stereotypes will be imposed [25].

The result of the present study showed that the interaction between managers' achievement and managers' sex for inner-ability was significant. This result provided convincing proof that achievement and failure in competitive achievement situations were differentially perceived and rated according to the gender of the successful or unsuccessful managers. As hypothesized, failure of female managers was attributed to internal reasons, that is, lack of ability. This is consistent with the findings of Ilgen and Youtz [16] and Weiner [15]. One of the reasons for this kind of attributions from the subjects might owe to the cultural stereotype in which the female should appear as humble and submissive and bold assertions and self-confidence is considered as a male attribute.

CONCLUSION

This research provided useful knowledge about how others attribute the achievement and failure of managers in the business arena. In these findings, achievement of

managers was attributed to internal causes, such as skill and talent. This is an interesting result as manager's performance that is attributed to internal reasons is considered by others as deserving promotions, because ability provides the greatest anticipation of performance over time. In any private sector organization the assessment of the superior about the subordinate greatly affects performance appraisal and promotions. This assessment is more realistic if they attribute performance to internal causes (ability etc) than to external causes (luck etc). The reasons of performance must be described to ascertain that people get the credit (or blame) that they deserve. In this manner, proper attributions can be made.

These findings also depicted that among male and female managers, inner- appearance and external factors are attributed equally. This result is an addition to the previous literature [14, 15] supporting gender differences in attributions made to the external factors and inner-appearance.

This research is practically useful for those organizations which believe in workforce diversity and want to get rid of stereotypical roles assigned to managers on the basis of gender. By understanding the qualities of successful managers; one can learn such behaviors through training programs for a developing a successful career path. With a significant amount of performance information over time and across incidents, the affect of stereotypes pertaining to the success of females as compared to males can be lessened. This impacts not only performance ratings themselves, but might affect the career prospects and advancement of female staff members.

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