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The influence of women leaders and their Authentic Leadership trait in India's Automobile Industry

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Abstract:

This study aims to shed light on authentic leadership traits in women leaders within India's automobile Industry and their influence towards building allies with co-workers in creating an inclusive workplace. The study would contribute to the large body of literature on leadership and growing studies on gender perspectives on authentic leadership. This paper engages by looking into a comparative perspective, first from the angle of the women leader and second from the angle of the co-worker. Using narrative research techniques, in conjunction with in-depth interviews, activities, and focus groups, this study seeks to establish the enablers, list the barriers, by focusing and bringing into surface the informal spaces experienced by women leaders and how authentic leadership traits influence co-workers in creating an inclusive workplace within the organization. The paper looks into the intrinsic factors which would be used as enablers in developing women into leadership roles.

1.1.Introduction:

The fabric of industries today has changed in addressing who and how decisions are made. These changes have posed challenges and opportunities in the way leadership is portrayed (Rajasekar, Beh and Palgrave, 2013). The language of gendered diversity in leadership has established itself in discussions and has been a highly appraised topic especially when industries and countries led by women have shown remarkable results (Park, 2022). Studies on women's leadership draw on the characteristics of the way women lead but do little to examine the organization's internal influencers. The key element is how authentic leadership trait within women leaders aid in building allies with co-workers in creating an inclusive workplace. The perspective of the women leader and the perspective of the co-worker would provide an intrinsic view into barriers and possible allies that could impact the growth of women. By remaining within the characteristics of women's leadership alone and the external barriers women face, studies have failed to connect the dots in their influencing factors within the organization, which currently lie dormant. This study aims to move beyond and bring to the surface, informal spaces that often get overlooked but are strong influencers towards creating an inclusive culture.

The automotive industry in India: The automotive Industry has been seeing massive global economic changes mainly stemming from the BRIC states: Brazil, Russia India, and China (Becker, 2006). In the context of India, the automobile industry has been one of the largest and fastest growing, accounting for “7.1% of the country's GDP” making the country the 5th largest automobile manufacturer in the world. (European Commission, 2022). This growth trend is predicted to grow even further with various government schemes boosting the domestic industry in this sector. The sector is one of the largest employer with production of vehicles increasing nearly fivefold since 1991 (Ayyappan *et al.*, 2009). The coevolution of the Indian manufacturers with the global giants has created an economic liberalisation posing challenges with regards to leadership expertise in dealing with a diverse workforce and a globalized market.

Leadership and Gendered Leadership: Leadership in the industry have been known for its one person led army, titled the ‘leader’ who revolutionises the organisation. In the case of the Chrysler group which was found standing at the edge of failure, was revived by a strong,

visionary and efficient leader who rebounded the organisation and brought it out of a crisis situation ('Chrysler group needs new leaders for a new era,' 2001). The focus on leadership came into light when one of the core drivers of the industry was innovation. The drive to sustainable innovation was very much an element of leadership. The effect of leadership towards innovation produced a culture of creativity leading to profitability and sustainability (Hlupic, 2014). This was critical for the automotive industry that was in constant need of staying ahead as techno leaders, and leadership playing the key contributor (Wanja *et al.*, 2020).

The role of leadership further diversified into understanding the role gender played in the matrix. In the context of India, the change was visible in the number of engineering graduates within the female population. As per the society of women engineers in India the country saw an enrolment of 30.2% of female students into engineering disciplines, with a 5% increase specific to mechanical engineering (Seema, 2022). The surge in interest within the engineering fields did see a slow yet gradual increase of women workforce within the automotive industry, which was until then considered to be a male dominated workforce. Organisations like MG motors, TATA motors, Renault Nissan have dedicated production lines where women engage in core production, design, engineering, and support functions. Tata Motors alone has over 3000 women operators('More women enter auto manufacturing as Tata Motors, Hero, MG accelerate gender diversity drive,' 2022)

Despite the drive of female candidates in engineering, government norms, and increased efforts into recruiting women, there is no doubt that the industry is lagging well behind other industries in its gender imbalance, particularly in leadership positions. Women's lack of leadership at the top is strikingly at odds with the industries views on workplace equality. The wealth of research in the theoretical lens has been centred around women's pay equality (Willi, 2021), women empowerment (Rodriguez, 2022) external factors as barriers to women's growth such as culture, religion and family life (Schünemann, 2020) and a few focused on the female customer base ('VW makes appeal to India's fast-growing female customer base,' 2022). Some notable and under-explored factors are what happens to the women who enter the industry, the intrinsic organisational factors that could act as barriers and potential influencers that get overlooked are areas of study that has had little to no attention.

1.2 Research Aim:

The aim of the study is to extend authentic leadership trait with women leaders from the automobile industry by understanding the influencers and perspectives. The study is aimed at not only identifying the influencing factors but to investigate the perspectives that would aid the industry in creating frameworks which add value in empowering future women leaders.

1.3 Research Objectives:

- To critically investigate how authentic leadership trait demonstrated by women leaders influence allies with co-workers in co-creating an inclusive workplace.

- To critically investigate the perspective of women leaders by looking into their professional identities focusing on the informal spaces to identify the path breakers and leadership journey creators.
- To critically investigate the perspective of co-workers towards women leaders as key drivers of women development within the organisation.

2.1 Authentic leadership influences and perspectives:

The traditional thinking of leadership styles is supplementary to the approaches found in leadership journals today, at times even challenging mainstream leadership studies. This study thereby would emphasise on a specific trait which could be well explained in its theoretical contribution in existing studies. The selection of trait for this study is based on two key aspects, the most recent trait attracting academic focus which looks into the profile of a leader and the most applicable. The characteristics of the leadership trait would be studied with the support of scholarly books, articles, journals to analyse and disclose the developments of the approaches. The trait chosen is authentic leadership in correlation with women leaders. Though recent studies have popularised authentic leadership within scholarly study, what characterises this trait in gendered leadership is a gap this study aims in bridging.

Current scholarly studies have concentrated largely on what organisations could do and failed to do (Kossek, Su and Wu, 2017), crack in the glass ceiling (Brown and Diekmann, 2013), stereotype threats at the workplace (Hoyt and Murphy, 2016), specific leadership styles of women (Gipson *et al.*, 2017), women of colour in leadership (Sanchez-Hucles and Davis, 2010) how women can have it all-work and their professional life (Vinnicombe, Burke and Blake-Beard, 2013) barriers women face such as intrinsic (job/life/family) and extrinsic factors (Kossek, Su and Wu, 2017) the role power plays in using male allies in addressing gender equality in organisations (Shapiro *et al.*, 2022). These are some of the recent studies on gendered leadership, with regards to authentic trait, studies have been limited in looking at authentic leadership towards inclusivity (Turesky and Warner, 2020) authentic leadership at the work life interface (Braun and Peus, 2016) authentic leadership and its influence on team performance (Lyubovnikova *et al.*, 2017). This study stands unique as it examines the dynamics of authentic leadership towards self-authorship of current women leaders and how using colleague ally could boost future generation of women into leadership roles.

In these challenging times organisations face relentless pressure from shareholders, customers, government, and employees. This calls for leaders to take a wider and longer view versus the short and narrow. This could never be achieved without increased self-awareness amongst leaders equating it to fostered authenticity in their followers. Authentic leadership has been known to enhance positivity (Avolio and Gardner, 2005). Reduce workplace deviances (Erkutlu and Chafra, 2013). Focused on leader follower relationship, this style of leadership has taken centre stage both academically and corporate in enhancing the ever growing need of efficient leadership (Wong and Laschinger, 2013). Authentic leaders have a passion (Harvard Business Review, 2018), a commitment, who are simply true to themselves. A leader high in ethical issues will result in high productivity resulting in trust from co-workers (Lyubovnikova *et al.*, 2017). Authentic leadership has been criticised to be a repackage of transformational leadership (Spiller, 2013), but this style is unique, as it looks at the profile of a leader, incorporates the self-contributors such as cultural, economic and gendered forces. In the

context of India which culturally believes in self-values and in a manufacturing industry where self-discipline is core, authentic leadership fits into this paradigm of study.

The dearth of authentic leadership in correlation with women leaders (Kapasi, Sang and Sitko, 2016) makes it a necessity to explore. This would be a unique area of study that would contribute to academic as well as industry.

Much of literature revolves around women leadership, ignoring its impact towards the male workforce. Critically acclaimed this gap has failed in creating an inclusive workplace as the entry of women has been seen as a threat rather than a partnership towards betterment. Many titles from glass ceiling to glass cliff that shows the extended barriers that women continue to face (Ryan and Haslam, 2007). Much of the research fails to take into context that the success of women in leadership roles could never happen at the cost of men. The male workforce are allies in the process and not spectators or competitors to be out beaten. The active involvement of the male workforce in gender diverse initiatives is crucial. The question arises on how women leaders use authentic leadership traits to influence this partnership, is an element that current research has been silent in addressing. The study would investigate this gap and provide the success factors that this alliance would create in progression for women within the organisation.

Women Leaders Perspective: An understanding of intrinsic factors from women leaders' who have navigated across leadership would bring to surface their leadership journeys. These experiences are critical in determining opportunities and in understanding their alignment in creating a collaborative workforce. Studies have revolved around perspective of women leaders from various levels of leadership (DeFrank-Cole and Tan, 2017). Work behaviour of women leaders and their influence towards team work (Wille *et al.*, 2018). Women's perspective on success as leaders have received much academic attention (David Baker, 2010). However intrinsic factors within the organisation and what women leaders experience from these informal spaces have received little to no attention. The result of this perspective would bring out internal shortcoming for women which would result in developing frameworks to enhance future women into leadership roles.

Co-worker perspective: Gender bias remains a challenge and studies around this area have done a fair amount of work in addressing these biases (Madsen and Andrade, 2018) (Wolfe, 2017). The dearth in study of how co-workers' positive perspective towards women leaders would advocate more women to take up leadership roles, which is a unique element this study would look into.

3.1 Methodology:

The purpose of this study would be to "come into contact with the intellectual territory of another way of thinking" (Craig, 2010) and a way to understand experiences (Lindsay and Schwind, 2016). Interpretation of experiences gained through in-depth reflexive interviews, pattern recognitions using the inductive approach would unearth the ways in which authentic leadership impacts the partnership of co-workers within the organisation. Though the research is in its early stages the researcher intends to use narrative research to enable the researcher to be the storyteller of the participants by using a thematic analysis. This would be the lens that the researcher would use to approach and structure the study.

The interview would include two stages of analysis, first the women leaders to reflect on their experience using a one-on-one interviewing method evaluated by using Bush's three dimensions of leadership "value, mission, and vision"(Bush, 2018) and a group discussion with activities in understanding the co-worker perspective. This data would help identify significance in the study leading to the creation of themes and create structures. The interpretation would be done dually. The first from the participants narratives and the other the narrative from the researcher's perspective.

Population Sample: The study would be instrumented at the OEM (Original Equipment Manufacturers) automotive manufacturers in India which would include (TATA Motors, Mahindra & Mahindra, Ford, Honda, Toyota, Hyundai, Renault Nissan, General Motors, Isuzu, Benz India) in which both male and female employees operate. The targeted population for the study would include for level one of the study women who hold leadership positions thus women in positions such as general manager, Vice president, President, Managing Director, CEO, CPO, CFO. For the second level of study which is to do with ally with colleagues, the targeted population would include male and female who are not necessarily from leadership positions but do work with or for the women leaders.

4.1 Contributors:

This study furthers the body of authentic leadership and how they influence allies with co-workers in creating an inclusive workplace. The intersecting perspectives would contribute to frameworks that could be used in practice to guide the automotive industry in empowering future generation of women leaders.

5.1 Further Development of this paper:

Between submission of this paper and BAM conference in September, the researcher would be working on developing and designing the outline of the study presented in this paper by commencing on a comprehensive literature review.

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