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# **Prosocial Motivation and Promotion for Managerial Positions**

## **Summary**

The number of women active in society has increased, but the ratio of female managers is still low. Many studies on inhibitory factors have been studied, and although the number of studies is small, the promoting factors are also being debated. However, although promotion occurs within the social relationship within the organisation, few studies have discussed promotion focusing on such social relationships. Therefore, this paper focuses on the concept of prosocial motivation to discuss women's promotion motivation arising from social relationships. As a result of the case study, in the absence of a managerial position as a women's role model in the organisation, it was found that prosocial motivation could stimulate promotion. This study contributes to the study of gender in organisations, illustrating women's promotion from the relational perspective.

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### **Introduction: Studies of Women's Promotion**

The number of women active in society has increased, but the ratio of female managers is still low. Therefore, we need to think about how organisations can remove barriers and stimulate women's aspiration to attain managerial positions.

Previous studies on female managers have mainly focused on barriers to promotion. According to Chun and Sahgal (2007: 353), there are five key recurring themes in women's career advancement: sex-role orientation, gender stereotyping, the glass ceiling, leadership in women management, and other aspects of career advancement. These were pointed out as factors to prevent women's promotion, and how to remove such barriers was a major research interest in these previous studies.

Arguments about the factors of stimulating women to be managers are few compared with studies that clarify barriers, but there are many studies about how role models can promote women's behaviour to be a leader. A role model is defined "person(s) an individual perceives to be similar to some extent, and because of that similarity, the individual desires to emulate (or specifically avoid) aspects of that person's attributes or behaviors" (Gibson, 2003: 592). Previous studies have discussed role models enables female workers to imagine a vision of the future and this assists in increasing their self-efficacy and career aspirations (Kanter, 1977; Nauta *et al.*, 1998).

Although the effects of role models are being studied, little attention has been given to the issue of women's motivation to make the decision to seek promotion. Promotion is generally argued as being caused by extrinsic motivation and/or intrinsic motivation. For example, since promotion leads to an increase in salary, it satisfies extrinsic motivation. Also, promotion has intrinsic motivation because it leads to expansion of authority, increasing opportunities to work based on self-decisions (Bénabou and Tirole, 2003; Deci and Ryan, 1985; McClelland and Burnham, 1976).

However, some researchers point out that there is a need to consider social relationships, especially "girl's networks", in the promotion of women (e.g., Chun and Sahgal, 2007). Since promotion behaviour is often stimulated within social relationships with supervisors, colleagues, and subordinates in the organisation, it is fully conceivable that such social factors will affect the individual's motivation for promotion.

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to consider women's motivation for promotion from the viewpoint of social relationships. Below, we insist that a prosocial motivation can stimulate women's promotion.

### **Prosocial Motivation**

People often want to make a positive influence on other people's lives. This desire is

called as prosocial motivation. According to Grant and Berry (2011), prosocial motivation is defined as “a psychological state in which employees are focused on the goal of benefiting other people” (Grant and Berry, 2011: 78). It is a concept based on a relational perspective. It is a desire to have a positive impact on the lives of others such as customers, colleagues, and supervisors, not oneself. Unlike other motivations, these motivations are formed and satisfied in relationships with others. In that sense, prosocial motivation is based on a relational perspective.

Grant (2007) focused on the context in which employees are embedded. He claimed that relational job architecture on employees’ tasks that are engaged by them affects their prosocial motivation. He discussed job design from two aspects; job impact on beneficiaries and contact with beneficiaries. Regarding the job impact on beneficiaries, this concerns how much it has an impact on beneficiaries including customers, clients, colleagues, subordinates, and supervisors and is explained using such dimensions as magnitude, scope, frequency and prevention focus. On the other hand, aspect of contact with beneficiaries concerns the dimensions of frequency, duration, physical proximity, depth, and breadth. Grant (2007) pointed out that the degree of job impact on beneficiaries and contact with beneficiaries are factors that stimulate prosocial motivation.

Grant (2007) argued that if the impact on the beneficiary and the relationship with the beneficiary is well established, prosocial motivation becomes stronger. Additionally, he suggested that affective commitment to beneficiaries brings out prosocial motivation. Affective commitment, which is enhanced by contact with beneficiaries, moderates the effect of the impact on beneficiaries on prosocial motivation. Thus, affective commitment is also pointed out as a factor in promoting prosocial motivation. In this paper, we discuss how prosocial motivation affects women’s promotion.

## **Method**

The research and analysis are based on a semi-structured interview with a Japanese female manager involved with one of the largest banks in Japan. The semi-structured interview was conducted based on a questionnaire about identifying people who influenced the informant’s career advancement. The collected data was transcribed and coded. After the procedure, we analyzed why she tried to develop her career in chronological order from the time she started the job in the bank until the date of the interview. The informant was a section manager and it took 17 years until she was offered her first promotion, and 21 years to get her current position.

She had worked in an organisation for a long time and her career development had been going well, however, she did not intend to pursue such a way of working at the

beginning of her career. This case could be seen as typical of the Japanese female employment structure and simultaneously shows problems and solutions regarding the employment of women in Japan.

### **Case Study**

The process by which a woman who was not so motivated at the beginning of her career obtained a higher managerial position for her younger co-worker is described in this case. The informant had an affective commitment to the younger female co-worker, which promoted the informant's prosocial motivation.

Initially, the role model was not sufficient for the informant. She did not imagine working for a long time in her career. Her mother, who was the closest woman to her, was also a housewife. Women colleagues around her also retired soon to become housewives.

*I did not focus on my career evolution at the beginning of my career in this bank because the women around me, including my mother, were not career minded. This made it difficult to imagine that I would work hard in my career. When I joined the company, people in clerical work like me retired after three to five years.*

At that time, Japanese women did not develop a work career because they had home-care perspective and generally became housewives after getting married. Such a tendency was seen in most Japanese female workers. The informant also did not have the expectation of a long career in the organisation. In addition, the employment system for women inherent in Japan, which entailed working for example as "a regular position worker" like a front office worker, or working in a back office as a "clerical worker" also influenced the informant's aspirations regarding career development.

The first reason why the informant aimed for the managerial position was that she felt she needed to be in a higher position when negotiating with various other departments. Even if a person in the same department agreed on a business improvement proposed by her, another person in the other department would refuse without considering it well. The informant said that because she was a woman, she didn't have a job title, and she could not develop her career enough. For this reason, she desired to get managerial positions so that she could be approval by her counterparts and negotiate on an equal footing.

Even now, there is no role model for the informant. We asked in the questionnaire whether there were some people who were role models for her, but she replied as follows.

*To be honest I think I do not have any role models at all. There are two reasons for this. First, men advance in their career in a different way to women in the bank. Second, while female workers gave me a lot of advice, we do not have the same work style. For example, I do not have kids, but a different work style and way of thinking about the future are needed if one has kids. I often discuss with a younger female colleague how we do not have co-workers who are in the same circumstances so it is difficult to imagine our career.*

The informant revealed that she would consult often with her younger female co-worker about her career. This younger female co-worker was working in the same occupational category. She was 10 years younger than the informant, with no kids and no husband, and was thinking of working for a long time in her work career, like the informant. She was a trainee who had been given internal training when the informant was working as the in-house work instructor before changing career track, and they had built a long-lasting relationship.

The informant was motivated to make a positive difference in other person's life and wanted to become a person whom people could rely on. The informant wished to get a higher managerial position and to assist with women who had similar backgrounds and career aspirations in the organisation.

*I think that the correct rating scale is whether I will be told by others "I am counting on you" or not. My current motivation is to be able to become person whom people rely on.*

*I know that my younger female co-worker will follow me later, so I would like to make a career path. This is becoming my motivation.*

## **Discussion**

The informant's efforts to build a career were driven by a prosocial motivation to help her younger female colleague who had the potential to be a manager, or to help the organisation rather than her desire for a better salary, status, or self-actualization. There was a shortage of female managers who were role models in the bank and the issue induced a feeling of uncertainty about women's work career in the organisation. Promotion to a higher managerial position under such circumstances would allow her to become a role model for the younger female colleague. This might assist the younger colleague to make her career image clearer and also other female employees who were

potential managers. In that sense, the behaviour of the informant in trying to build a work career can be argued to be prosocial behaviour.

Grant (2007) suggests that affective commitment to beneficiaries promotes prosocial motivation. From the case study, we can understand that the informant had a stronger affective commitment to the younger female colleague. There were many similarities, such as a shared background in job and life stage between the informant and the younger colleague, and even now they remain in frequent contact. From this, affective commitment to the informant's younger colleague developed.

The facts revealed in this study indicate that there are cases where promotion is stimulated by prosocial motivation, and this is a major academic contribution. Previous research has considered intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to be a manager. On the other hand, this research employs a relational perspective and has clarified that the cause of promotion is based on the relationship with others.

This study also has practical implications. There are women who have ability but have little motivation for promotion and they may be reluctant to be promoted even if they receive extrinsic or intrinsic rewards. However, this paper suggests that they may promote for other females in organisation. The study assist motivation such women.

On the other hand, further research is needed on whether prosocial motivation always encourages promotion behaviour. This case only investigated how prosocial motivation assisted promotion behaviour in an organisation where there were only a few female managers and role models. However, in situations where there are sufficient female leaders, promotion based on prosocial behaviour will not be observed. Therefore, we need to discuss the relationships among prosocial motivation, promotion behaviour, and organisational context.

**Note: Comments on how we plan to develop the paper**

- We are planning to develop the paper as follows.
- Deepen the review of women's promotion to summarize the standpoint and clarify the limitations of previous studies.
- Broaden the review of prosocial motivation to make the case study clear.
- Acquire data from the informant and her younger female co-worker and create a thick description focusing on what stimulated the informant's prosocial motivation and the informant's aspiration to attain higher promotion.
- Link our findings to other studies and knowledge of other fields.

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