

Preference or Eligibility? A Qualitative Inquiry of Leaders' Agency and Communality in Gender, Employment Status and Hierarchical Levels in the Public and Private Banking Service Sector

Ayesha Ali, PhD

University of the Punjab, Higher Education Commission
22ayasha11@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study inquired into the concept that men and women are labeled with qualities associated to their gender, employment, and hierarchical levels. The objective is to study the communal/ agentic traits by each gender in the banks in service sector of Lahore, Pakistan. The paper employed qualitative strategy with semi-structured interview to gather information and themes from purposively chosen higher management personnel in the banks in the service industry of Lahore, Pakistan. The results showed that the gender, employment statuses and various hierarchical levels have a mixture of agency and communality. However, some new insights were also found regarding organizational structure, gender and spirituality in the qualitative information which proved beneficial for the organizational structure and employment.

Key Words: *behavioral traits, agency, communality, gender, employment, eligibility, hierarchy, higher management, higher education, service sector.*

INTRODUCTION

This article investigates the stereotyping of roles in employees' professional lives according to their gender, employment and hierarchical statuses. Various studies in the organizational behaviors and psychology characterize men by agentic qualities and women with communal qualities (Rosner, 1990; Spence & Helmreich, 1978; Bem, 1974). This categorization is due to the division of professional work between the two genders. The females are usually allocated with the domestic responsibilities whereas males are usually assigned with remunerated employment. The Role Congruity Theory (Agut et. al., 2022; Eagly & Karau, 2002), elucidates this division as "Descriptive norms" which explains the features of a group while "injunctive and the prescriptive norms" enumerate ideal attributes of the group. In relation to the two genders, these descriptive norms pertain to the communal (for instance; nurturing, cooperative or sensitive) or agency, i.e. competitive, dominant and aggressive (Eagly & Diekmann, 2005; Eagly, 2004; Newport, 2001; Williams & Best, 1990).

The indication of prejudice towards prospective candidates during the selection is based on 'descriptive norms' emphasizing upon the members of the group to be possessing such characteristics which are most likely stereotypical of their relevant group. Therefore, they may not be perceived as eligible for that specific post. On the other hand, the prejudice for the role occupants may also base upon some 'prescriptive norms.' It means that these role occupants with the incongruent roles do meet with negative

reactions for breaching the prescriptive norms while they receive positive feedback on their better performance in that role or capacity.

Eagly (1987) provided a review of social behavior highlighting gender differences as having two types of aspects: agentic and communal. Here, communal includes affection, nurturance, helpfulness, emotional expressiveness and sympathy (Baraket et. al., 2023). The studies show that the women are considered to possess these qualities more frequently (Rosner, 1990; Spence & Helmreich, 1978). Nevertheless, agentic behavior is characterized as displaying assertiveness, goal directedness, independence, self-sufficiency, and aggressiveness. The men are usually associated with the agentic qualities. Literature shows that the agency attributes are conceived as the prerequisite of better prospects in employment, therefore, women who are perceived to be lacking in agency attributes due to stereotypes are considered ineligible for employment particularly a decision-making post at the top management.

The agentic and communal division between males and females manifests in the shape of a major block composed of stereotypical 'difference barrier' between genders which acts as the most noticeable panel of the 'glass ceiling' that women face and tackle with in upward progression in their professional careers.

The literature indicates that agentic and masculine traits are highly valued as a prequalification for better prospects at leadership, executive or managerial position which often is a shortcoming for women as they are stereotypically socialized in communal behaviors. When they have to assume agentic behaviors to perform their professional jobs, they usually confront conflict within themselves and their performance evaluators at the job (Carli, 2001; Heilamn, Wallen, Fuchs & Tuamkins, 2004; Rudman & Glick, 1999)

Despite huge research and discussion on the subject, the evidence is scant that men or women differ in their capabilities to display agentic or leadership qualities and communal or mentoring, roles (Hyde, 2005; Plant, Hyde, Keltner & Devine, 2000). Still, the stereotypes exist to serve as an influence the evaluations of female leaders and executives to an extent that they face a dual nature situation in their managerial careers that they receive appreciation when they perform communally while simultaneously, they are considered as ineligible for managerial or the highest position. Also, while delivering in an agentic mode due to the nature of their job, they often suffer backlash and clashes with their stereotype gender roles making them less agreeable or undesirable for the high positions.

This study is inspired by the fact that in Pakistan, there is scant research upon the gender, employment status and hierarchical levels with reference to the level of agency and communality. Moreover, this phenomenon is less focused upon as far as the service sector is concerned. Therefore, the article tries to bridge the research gap found in the service industry. This research is also inspired by the research call given by Pittarello and Motro (2024) who highlighted the need of research in gender stereotyping and role congruity in various contexts and cultures. The research problem relates to a common phenomenon that it is believed that men and women are tagged with difference of qualities, and these are usually stereotyped with the gender. Based on these, there are views that genders face different treatments at the time of employment and during stepping up the hierarchical levels. The study aims to investigate whether the gender according to the respective norms, employment statuses and hierarchical levels tend to display communal traits or agentic traits. The problem has serious repercussions on the employees' promotion, remuneration, role allocation and role clarity. The paper also attempts to fill the gap in literature

by studying the males and females simultaneously along with employment statuses and hierarchical levels, given the past research tended to inspect them in isolation. Thus, the study highlights the level of agency and communality keeping in view the socio-cultural, organizational, and human resource settings in Pakistan.

The paper seeks to provide the detailed outline of factors representing men and women in top positions of management within the organizations particularly, public and private banks in Lahore, Pakistan. For this purpose, qualitative interviews were conducted. The results provide important insights that both agentic and communal traits can exist in men and women at various employment and hierarchical levels.

Following are the objectives of the study;

- To determine the level of agentic/ communal traits in working men and women.
- To determine whether employment has a relationship with the level of agentic traits.
- To determine whether hierarchical position in the organization has a relationship with agentic traits.

Research Question

In order to capture a composite picture of the difference barrier in the career of females, this research study has endeavored to investigate the supposed entrapment of female managers into their perspective gender traits/ norms and falling short of performing at par with their male counterparts by finding answers to the following research questions;

“Do women in line with their perspective gender norms tend to display more of communal traits in contrast to the display of agentic traits by their male colleagues and reinforce the stereotypical beliefs about their lack of eligibility for employment or leadership positions?”

- Does the difference exist or not in the level of agency/ communality in men and women?
- Whether employment has a relationship with the level of agency/ communality or not?
- Whether hierarchical position in the organization has a relationship with agency/ communality or not?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Super-ordinated labels of communion and agency originated from Bakan (1966). These terms have framed key issues from many disciplines of study including , psychotherapy (Kiesler & Auerbach, 2003), cultural psychology (Ybarra, et al., 2008; Phalet & Poppe, 1997), personality psychology (Paulhus & Trapnell, 2008; Wiggins, 1991), and social psychology (Abele & Bruckmüller, 2011; Wojciszke et.al., 2011; Fiske et. al., 2007; Abele & Wojciszke, 2007; Judd et. al., 2005). These terms are often labeled as “fundamental dimensions” (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007; Judd et.al., 2005) and “big two” (Paulhus & Trapnell, 2008).

Agency is often described as the actions of an individual struggling to attain one’s goals and objectives, individualize and aggrandize the self. The attributes of agency include being decisive, active,

competent and strong (Nagurney et. al., 2024; Abele & Bruckmüller, 2011). While the communality indicates struggles of an individual to identify as part of society. Its traits comprise of friendliness, cooperation, warmth and trustworthiness (Takizawa et. al., 2024; Abele & Bruckmüller, 2011). Thus, agency is about “getting ahead” and communality is about “getting along” (Paulhus & Trapnell, 2008).

Agentic and communal characteristics have been distinguished based on their aspects such as profitable for self and others (Vonk, 1999; Abele & Wojciszke, 2007). Self-profitable qualities include aspects which unconditionally and directly are helpful for possessor of those traits, thus, these are identified as agentic traits. While the other people may also benefit from such characteristics, which is dependent upon the objectives and intentions of the possessor. These traits can be directly and unconditionally favorable or harmful for others. Nevertheless, these traits can also be beneficial for the trait possessor depending upon the objectives and intentions (Abele & Bruckmüller, 2012). Adaptive value of these traits depends upon the perception of these traits either from perspective of trait possessor or perspective of other (observer) person (Abele & Bruckmüller, 2012; Wojciszke et. al., 2011).

When examined from the observer's viewpoint, the observer is primarily concerned with determining whether the target is approachable or should be avoided before interpreting the target's behavior (Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007; Peeters & Czapinski, 1990). What the observer seeks are communal traits of the target (Abele & Bruckmüller, 2011), which are also deemed crucial in self-perception for initiating and maintaining benevolent relationships with others. Conversely, individuals possessing agentic traits prioritize the attainment of immediate action goals, making agentic traits more significant in self-perception (Nagurney et al., 2024).

Various studies have highlighted the stereotyping of groups (Abele et al., 2021; Fiske et al., 2002), including gender stereotyping (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Diekmann & Eagly, 2000). Groups can be stereotyped as warm or cold based on a perceiver's perception of their own group's competitiveness with others. Males are often stereotyped as competent or non-competent (possessing agentic traits) based on their hierarchical status and pursuit of self-interest, while females, stereotyped with communal traits, are seen as caretakers prioritizing others' interests (Conway, Pizzamiglio, & Mount, 1996).

Empirical evidence has demonstrated that gender stereotypes persist both in non-work and work settings (Heilman, 2001), with research indicating that most women in managerial positions exhibit fewer agentic traits compared to men (Breen & Baretto, 2023; Heilman et al., 1995). While some studies suggest that women in industries may exhibit more agentic traits than those in non-working conditions, female managers still tend to lack agentic traits compared to their male counterparts. Even highly successful women managers exhibit a slight difference in trait characterization compared to men. Consequently, the increasing presence of women in workplaces does not eradicate gender stereotyping.

Moreover, gender stereotypes are not merely descriptive but also prescriptive, delineating expected behaviors for women and men in specific situations (Burgess & Borgida, 1999; Eagly, 1987; Terborg, 1977). Leadership roles in organizational, military, and political settings are predominantly associated with males, leading to fewer women in elite management positions despite advancements in equality. The concept of the 'glass ceiling' has gained popularity to describe this phenomenon, representing a barrier to women's advancement to top management positions (Morrison et al., 1987).

The rarity of women in elite management positions persists despite indicators of 'equality' or 'near equality,' often attributed to the 'pipeline problem' indicating a lack of qualified women for these roles (Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1993). Other factors, such as familial responsibilities and inherited traits, may also hinder women from displaying the motivation and traits required for success in top management positions (Breen & Baretto, 2023; Heilman, 2001). Prejudice towards female top managers can stem from incongruity between the characteristics perceived in women and the expectations for leadership roles (Heilman, 2001).

Rudman and Glick (1999; 2001) conducted studies with contrasting results, indicating that deviations from prescriptive stereotypes for women, such as displaying agency, are often met with resistance. Hence, job descriptions with feminine attributes may negatively impact hiring decisions, termed the 'backlash effect' (Melanie, Steffens, & Irena, 2009). Rudman & Glick (2001) stated that the traditional job descriptions, however, do not elicit such effects on hiring decisions which is labeled as backlash effect.

Research Design

This study examines the concepts from perspective of constructivism thus emphasizing on methods, stresses upon the research problem and uses sense making approach available in order to comprehend the research problem (Morgan, 2007). This paradigm draws liberally from qualitative assumptions, methods and data and highlights a interpretivist and constructivist theoretical lens to encompass the worldviews. This paradigm helps to understand how sense making beings interpret the social phenomena. The research employed qualitative study in a cross sectional setting to identify the level of agency and communality in gender, various employment statuses and hierarchical levels.

The cross-sectional approach was appropriate as the purpose was to inquire the situation of agency and communality related to the three variables. The themes were identified through the qualitative information gathered through the interviews of purposively chosen higher management personnel. Grounded theory approach was used to identify themes by constant comparison method and inductive reasoning though the process started deductively by metacoding. The purpose was to explain the phenomena through the use of explanation and verification through qualitative inquiry.

METHODOLOGY

The research study employed qualitative strategy and techniques in a cross sectional setting to understand the concept of agency and communality in gender, various employment statuses and hierarchical levels. Thirty five individuals, from public and private banks in Lahore, Pakistan, were requested to give appointment for the face to face semi structured interview in order to investigate them to comprehend the level of agency and communality in gender, various employment statuses and hierarchical levels. These were purposefully selected individuals, both males and females, occupying higher management positions so that they could explain their experiences in relation to gender, employment time and progressing through the hierarchy. This method provided the opportunity to explore the concepts by obtaining firsthand information through relevant employees. The purpose of using semi-structured interviews was to explain the phenomena and substantiate the findings in depth through the use of qualitative analysis. There were three interviewers. The individual interviews were conducted on the scheduled time in the organizational setting which lasted from half to one hour.

Population and Sampling: For qualitative inquiry, the interviewees were the professional males or females at higher managerial positions in the service sector. The sample acquired for the qualitative study was selected through non-probability sampling procedure (Purposive sampling) which is as follows;

Purposive Sample: The qualitative study was based on the data collection through interviews of purposively chosen male and female individuals at high management levels in the service sector to examine the (level of) agency and communality.

Type of Data, Unit of Analysis and Research Instruments: The primary data was collected for the research through face to face interviews. The unit of analysis in the research was the individuals i.e. male, females, employed, low-middle-high level job incumbents. The instrument used was the interview schedule.

Interviews, Data Collection and Analysis Procedure: The semi-structured face to face interviews, using interview schedule, were employed for gathering the qualitative information from the interviewees. This strategy is appropriate when the explanation of the factors/ themes is required to comprehend the results. This method was considered to be reliable and valid (peer review) especially for the present study since it helped collect ideas and themes, pertaining to the level of agency and communality in gender, various employment statuses and hierarchical levels. Further, the emails/ letters of consent were sent and signed prior to the conduction of interview. This process was conducted by a team of researchers and helpers in person. The data was acquired by arranging semi structured interviews at the thirty-five interviewees' respective organizations in different phases in one week. There were 11 questions that related to the job, treatment and problems faced by the respondents. Some of the interviews were recorded and transcribed or the field notes were taken as it depended upon the consent of the interviewee for the recording. Privacy was maintained so that the interviewee could answer in a relaxed, fair and unbiased manner and also, he or she was not constrained or disturbed by various socio-contextual factors. Then after the theme identification and coding through paper and pencil technique, data was entered in Nvivo (10.0) to be coded and to obtain graphical representation.

Data Analysis Tool: The software (tools) were employed for the data analysis; Nvivo 10.0 (latest version of software) for qualitative analysis (of data gathered through interviews). This software helped in the generation of codes, parent and child nodes and production of graphic representation/ tree diagram of themes and variables.

Research Ethics: Following factors were taken care of during the research investigation; The participants' security was given due consideration. The information they provided maintains anonymity and confidentiality. The participants were not deceived regarding the purpose of the research. They were given proper information about the research aims and process. Only safe and no harmful procedures were employed.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

In order to investigate the agency and communality in men and women, the qualitative study was employed through the semi-structured, open ended, in-depth and face to face interviews with thirty five respondents (male & female) at the higher management levels. They were purposely selected from the

public and private service sectors (multiple sites and respondents). *Grounded theory approach* was used to identify themes by *constant comparison method* and inductive reasoning though the process started deductively by *metacoding*. *Thick descriptions* have been intended so that the comprehension of the phenomena can be improved. The purpose was to detect similarities and differences across themes and data. Also, there was scope to generate *unanticipated insights*. Moreover, the themes are generated from social, contextual, and psychological perspective of Pakistan. The study was based on an interpretivist’s approach employing ontological foundation that reality is subjective and in here. The epistemological perspective adopted is that the knowledge is created by social constructionism/ constructivism by the self-interpreting beings.

THE PARTICIPANTS

As purposive sampling was used, the selection of respondents was based on two criteria: (a) individual’s occupying high management position and (b) representative of either males or females. These characteristics (were present in them and were also the basis of their selection) are detailed in the table below;

Table 1. *The Profile of the Thirty Five Participants*

<i>Title (Name)</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Experience in years</i>	<i>Designation</i>
Interviewee no 1-10	Male	60	35	AVP
Interviewee no 10-15	Female	50+	25	Regional Head
Interviewee no 16-25	Female	45+	30	Branch Head
Interviewee no 26-30	Male	40+	30	Branch Manager
Interviewee no 31-35	Female	35+	36	Manager

DATA COLLECTION

The study involved participants from Lahore, Pakistan. Interviews took place in their workplaces to assess the environment and evaluate the alignment between participants' perspectives and the actual circumstances. These individuals were highly skilled in their respective fields, possessing relevant education and experience. Personal connections facilitated the scheduling of appointments and fostered openness and trust, enhancing the quality of information gathered during interviews. An interview schedule guided the questioning, with additional inquiries made as needed. While one participant consented to audio recording, field notes were taken for the remaining interviews. To ensure accuracy, field notes from the three interviewers were cross-referenced.

DATA PROCESSING AND ANALYSIS (data feeding, coding & generating diagrams)

The researcher transcribed the interviews. In one case, the recording of interview was allowed but the field notes were taken for the other interviews. The paper and pencil technique was used to highlight the main ideas and then the cutting and sorting technique was employed to pile the similar themes together. The researcher tried to be a splitter but only in one case gender dissimilarities, the differences were magnified between the items or piece of information. The rest of the inquiry was guided by being more of

a lumpers as overlapping themes started to emerge and thus the differences were minimized to identify overarching themes.

Metacoding involves the utilization of predefined themes to facilitate the emergence of new themes and overarching mega-themes. This methodology necessitates both a dataset, which in my case consisted of interview transcripts, and a predetermined set of themes derived from existing literature and questionnaire items. Metacoding facilitated the identification of themes aligned with the predetermined ones, guided by the research questions and objectives. To condense the numerous sub-themes into primary themes and uncover any latent or unexpected themes, multiple reviews of the interview data were conducted. The interview transcripts were transcribed and imported into Nvivo 10.0 for analysis. With the assistance of Nvivo, five major theme categories (parent nodes), along with their respective sub-categories (child nodes) pertinent to the research inquiries, were generated and are detailed below.

RESULTS AND INTERPRETATIONS (Coding and thematic analysis)

After the generation of themes, coding and thematic analysis was done with Nvivo 10.0 which yielded several graphical representations. For coding purpose, the themes were divided mainly into two main categories (parent nodes) i.e. (1) agency and (2) communality. **(1) Agency** was further subcategorized {child nodes (and even more refined third level categories given in brackets along the sub categories)} into (i) achievement, (ii) ambition, (iii) competence (adaptation & accommodation, education & training, hard work & punctiliousness, learning & experience, responsibility & task orientation), (iv) excitement & extraversion, (v) leadership & vision (assertiveness & astuteness, competition & lobbying, control & discipline, decision making, influence, participation and power & politics), (vi) superiority & self projection (status & aggrandizement), (vii) wealth. **(2) Communality** was also further subcategorized into (i) consideration (sharing & cooperation), (ii) harmony (balance, humility, public relations), (iii) honesty & sincerity (commitment & perseverance, dedication), (iv) problem solving (altruism, flexibility & optimism, forgiveness, patient hearing & context driven behavior, tolerance).

A few other strong themes emerged which were also discussed separately. (3) The gender itself emerged as an evident motif. There are seen similarity, dissimilarity and family/ social factors related to gender. (4) Then the focus, regardless of gender, was on the organizational structure. And the categories of contractual/ temporary versus permanent jobs, hierarchical system, inefficiency & complaining behavior, merit, public and private sectors were found. (5) Another, theme irrespective of gender was religiosity or spirituality. Basic agency or communal traits were taken from the literature review but all the qualitative dimensions and themes were further elaborated according to the information provided by the participants. First the color nodes were generated;

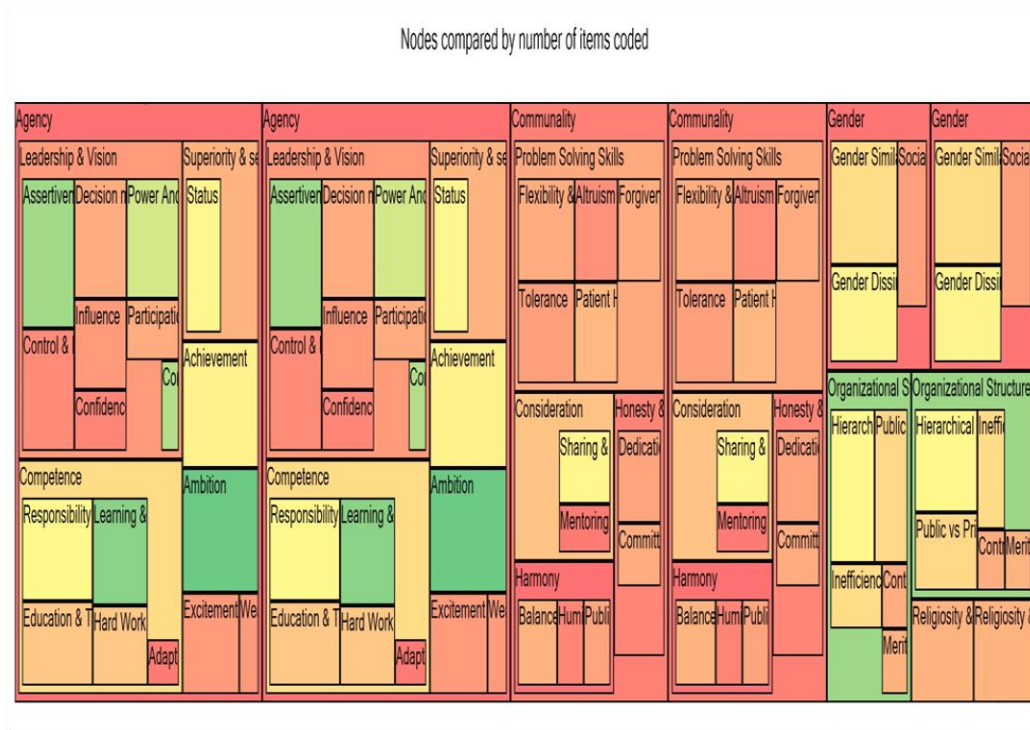


Figure 1 Color Nodes of Classification And Hierarchy of Themes

FINDINGS, DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Through the analysis of interviews and themes, it was found that the participants had a combination of agentic and communal traits. Some of the respondents were agentic and some were communal or both in some respects. It was found that that the traits depended on the contextual demands, job requirements and the type of matter under consideration. Mostly professional issues and career progression matters were imbued with agentic spirit and it was observed that people oriented matters favored communal approach in the participants. An important observation was that all the themes revolved around the management position as is displayed in word cloud;



Figure 2 Centrality of Hierarchical Position (high)

The same concept can be seen in text query in the following figure;

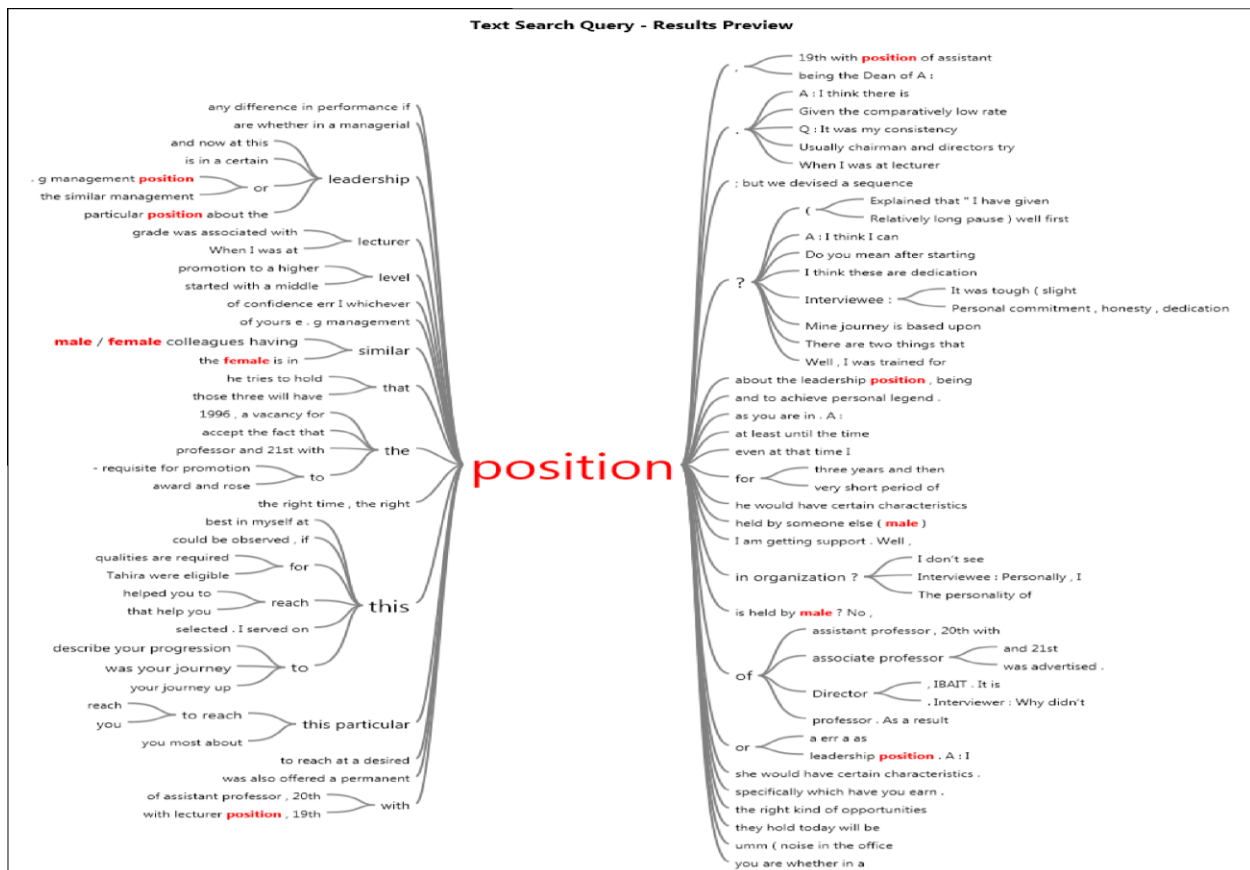


Figure 3 Relation of Hierarchical Position with other Constructs

The themes generated were analyzed by Nvivo to develop a classification and further hierarchy of themes as can be seen below;

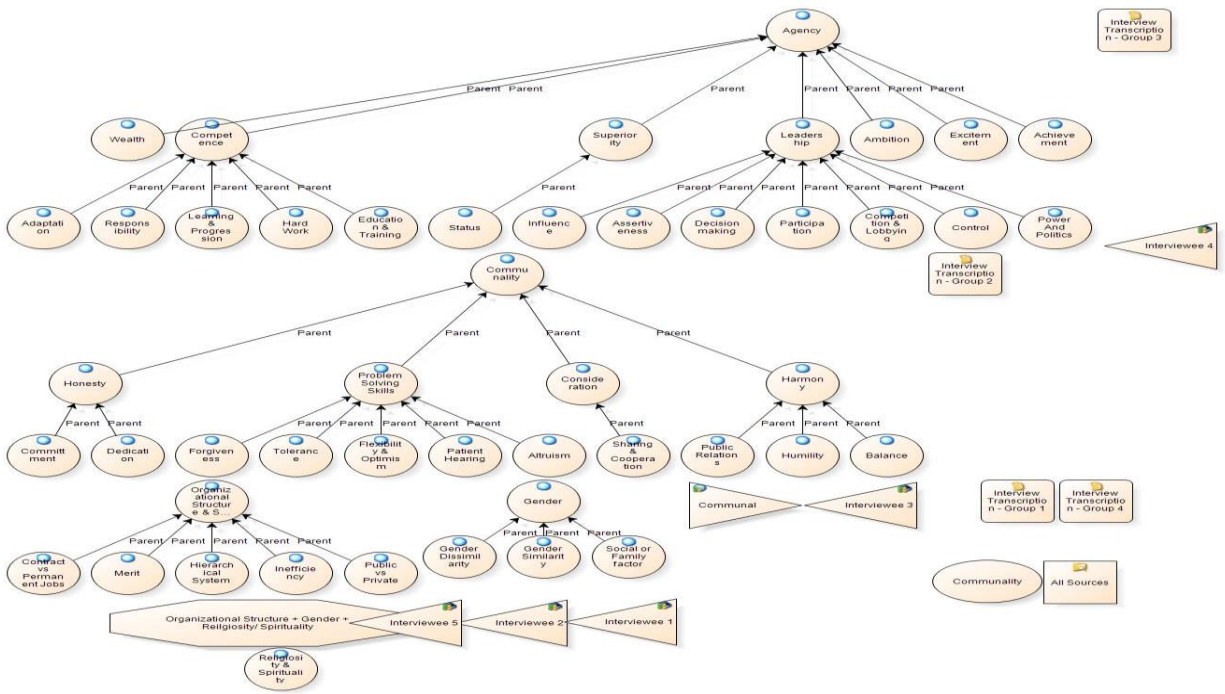


Figure 4 Hierarchy of Themes (Tree Diagram, with reference to interviews)

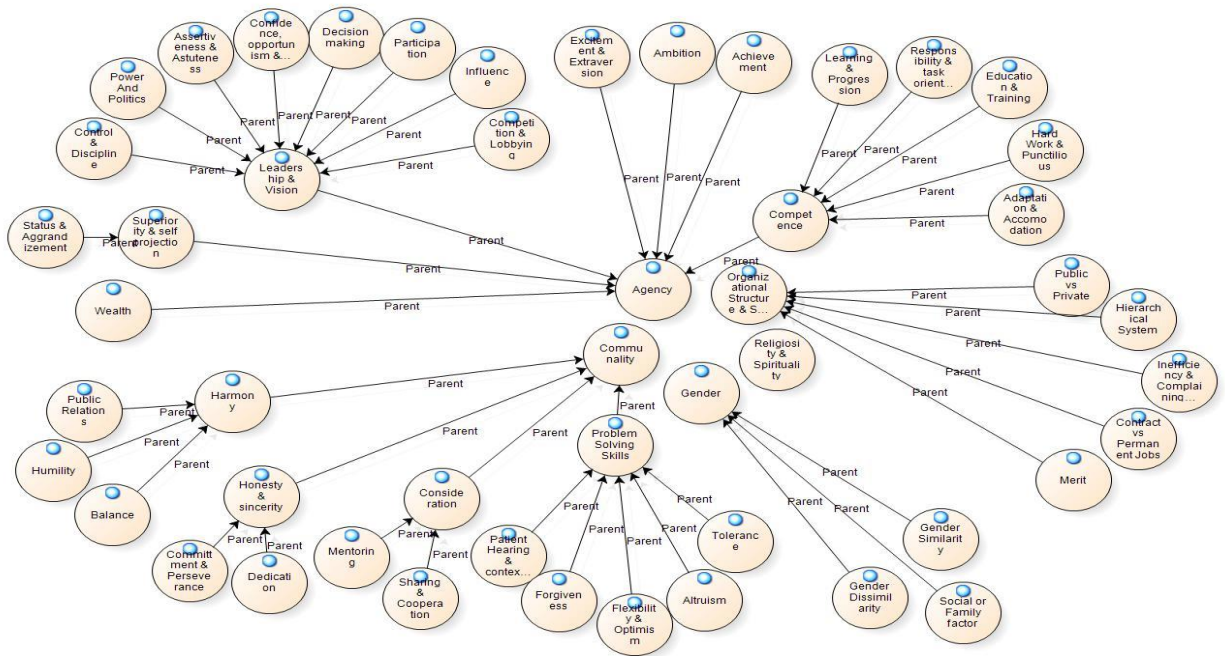


Figure 5 Step Wise Representation of Themes

Themes are detailed below for gender, employment and high management level position.

1) AGENCY:

The quality and theme of agency was found significant and is analyzed in detail first.

- (i) **Achievement;** The theme of achievement, as indicative of success and attaining goals, was evident in both the genders. Frequent was the use of synonymous words like ‘award’, ‘completion of project’, ‘selected’, ‘I became chairman/ professor’ and ‘got the job’.
- (ii) **Ambition:** Similarly, ambition (taken here for the aspirations and seizing opportunities) was recurrent in the words like “accept the offer, serving self interests, joined, ambitious, desire to achieve, passion, applied, offered, where you want to be, right kind of opportunities, grabbed’.
- (iii) **Competence:** Sub-theme of Competence was evident as nearly all the interviewees used expressions like having ‘required skill mix’ for the job. Some of them uttered that ‘I was able’ to do the work. Other participants at high management position proclaimed having the ‘ability’ or ‘wisdom’. One of them said that ‘I teach them’, ‘everybody is unique’, ‘I deal/ handle them’. However, further finer subcategories emerged from the main theme. Sub-theme of *adaptation & accommodation* was found as “requirements and nature of job’ determined the eligibility of the occupant. *Education & training* was a recurrent sub theme which was considered as an aid by the participants to enhance the competence and eligibility for the professional life e.g. the phrases like ‘MBA Degree in Finance, Ph.D. program, did my Ph.D, trained for the job, education, ability to do the job’ expressed the refinement of one’s abilities through education for the progress in career. *Hard work & Punctiliousness* was found to be the key to reaching high positions as echoed in words like ‘sit late, working till late 6-7 p.m or 11 p.m, absorbed in work, consistency, focus’. *Learning & progression* happened during the progression of the career and their lives. All the participants referred to “learn, start of career, now, changes, understand, experience, progress and develop’. *Responsibility & task orientation* was found to be significant for the professional people at high positions. Working was about delivering ‘responsibilities, official duties,’ being ‘punctual, regular’ etc.
- (iv) **Excitement & extraversion:** The Excitement & extraversion to do something was referred to by both genders. Expressions were oft repeated that explained it i.e. ‘accident, exciting, enthusiasm, happening’.
- (v) **Leadership & Vision:** Another subtheme Leadership & Vision, noticed in both genders, for employment and high management level position, was found important to run the affairs and manage the organization. All the participants repeatedly used words like ‘leader, leading by example, management, I think more global perspective’ etc. The theme was further sub-divided; (i) *Assertiveness & Astuteness* (I ask, aggressive, I think, my, myself, assertive, self confidence, I found, I know’); (ii) *Competition & lobbying* (The theme is imbued with undertones of maneuvering or leaguings against each other. It is rampant with attitude of cynicism and adopting a critical and shrewd analytical lens towards the competitors. The phrases are self explanatory; ‘five candidates, two vacancies, were selected, were not selected, teacher, excludes him from the community, teachers will not treat him as a teacher, competition for the promotion, we asked them both to apply, created this competition for me, told them that we would try to get both of them promoted’); (iii) *Confidence, opportunism & shrewdness* was evident in the confessions of some interviewees. “The kind of opportunities I got, were unique. It was the right time, the right position the right kind of opportunities that I grabbed and I was successful” reflects the confidence in one’s abilities to snatch the chances and the word ‘grab’ is highly symbolic of opportunism. (iv) *Control & Discipline*

was seen important to maintain the order and avoid chaos ('reprimanding employees at the spot, take strict action, can stop talking with him/her'); (v) *Decision making* was considered valuable trait for running the affair of an organization ('decision, decision making, decided'); (vi) *Influence* was the ability to divert things to the planned and expected target ('placed at my disposal, he works through them, get the work done from others effectively, you would say would immediately apply'); (vii) *Participation* was encouraged to get multi-dimensional views though in most cases it was a directed (somewhat like facilitated/ consultative) approach of management ('participatory, involvement, bringing in new perspectives, Consultation'); (viii) *Power & Politics* was found with tinges of lack of transparency to secure self interests ('politics, managed to survive, political skills, leg pulling, sensitivity, usually chairman and directors try, usually they are the ones becoming hurdle in their way to career progression, there is always politics in such case, unhealthy pressure').

- (vi) **Superiority & self projection:** According to the interviewees' remarks, the theme of Superiority & self projection was deemed significant by the researcher as it was in keeping with the comments like 'making distinct mark, excel, being competitive product, I am the best, I am the only person eligible, I never failed, only one who had become professor, the driving seat' represented an air or supremacy among the people holding prime slots. *Status & aggrandizement* was an extension found with superiority. Numerous phrases of 'position of director, leadership position, Assistant Professor, Associate professor, being chairman, dean' were used to express the place of status and self expansion or aggrandizement in one's life and efforts.
- (vii) **Wealth:** Wealth, though less spoken of directly, carried significance as undertones of 'salary, emoluments, incentives and benefits' were referred to several times.

2) COMMUNALITY:

Then the second major category of characteristics and themes was of the *communality* that was considered vital for employment and high management level position. Use of 'we' had implications for a collective community, cooperation fellow feeling and people orientation.

- (i) **Consideration:** The main streak was one of consideration of people expressed through statements that appeared to give regard to 'their consent, views, problems and respect'. *Mentoring* was found, as a sub-theme, in the people holding prime slots as they try to guide and coach their subordinates as expressions like 'I believe more in counseling of my junior colleagues' and 'we told them' represented the mentoring spirit. *Sharing & Cooperation* was an extension of the said motif resounding in the words like 'we faced, we approached, team members, mutual collaboration, both of us, we knew'.
- (ii) **Harmony:** Harmony was also the main characteristics regardless of gender. *Balance*, through the impartial dealings, was found to be vital at high management level as one has to be 'stable'. 'I am not supposed to take sides with conflicting parties, satisfy them, balanced personality, neither being too strict nor so much lenient'. Another sub-theme, *Humility* was required in the shape of being naïve and modest and had some undertones in words like 'humble, moderate, modest' etc. *Public relations and interaction* is considered as essential to maintain good terms with others. It carried essential references in expressions of 'public dealing, meet up daily, interpersonal and meet each other'. These traits had to be there in the job incumbent as vocalized by most of the participants.

- (iii) **Honesty and Sincerity:** Honesty and sincerity in performing work was also given due importance by the interviewees. *Commitment, Perseverance in and ownership* of the work and in followers was considered vital for professional work. All the participants talked about being committed to the work. *Dedication, consistency and focus* were taken as significant for the delivery of quality work at high management level positions.
- (iv) **Problem Solving Skills:** Problem occurrence and problem solving skills were mentioned by all the participants. The sub theme *Altruism* (helping others) existed in the practical life in the midst of competition; the participants were willing to ‘help them, guide them, give them’ in order to facilitate their fellow beings. Another category of problem resolution was being *flexible and optimistic (flexibility and optimism)* to find solution to the problems by being open and positive. *Forgiveness* of the mistakes was referred to by ‘counseling, overlook, forgive’. *Patient hearing & context driven behavior* was related to settle problems; many of the participants referred to ‘listen, ask, hear’ peoples’ problems. *Tolerance* was another communal characteristic found important for employment and high positions in both genders. Expressions of ‘more tolerant, never get hyper soon, lot of patience, most valuable characteristics’ were repeated found.

3. GENDER:

Though, this study aimed to study the *Gender* but it provided certain insights pertaining gender in its own respect.

- (i) **Gender dissimilarity:** There was Gender dissimilarity, as can be seen in following phrases; ‘not allow them to fully concentrate, top most priority for females, organizational objectives or requirements of work come second, not acceptable in our society, females have advantage over the males, males will be considered as good at leadership positions’.
- (ii) **Gender similarity:** But numerous instances referred to Gender similarity like ‘does not exist any gender discrimination’, ‘I don’t think much significant differences’, ‘the dean and I are mostly thinking on the same line,’ ‘I don’t see any dissimilarities, it’s the same for men and women’.
- (iii) **Social and family factor:** However, a third element **social and family factor** was present for the females on some occasions; ‘constrained by certain social bindings,’ ‘domestic obligations,’ ‘husband and kids supported me.’

4. ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND PROCEDURES

Organizational structure and procedures were important external factors mentioned by participants irrespective of gender that seemed to determine many agentic and communal qualities and the behavior of males and females at various hierarchical levels; ‘radical structural changes, no hard and fast rules for promotion, whenever a seat is vacant and everyone who will apply, the vacancy is advertised, panel of referees is formed, pre-defined system of rotation, we have a procedure’. The sub-themes found were the contractual/ temporary jobs that had an influence over the permanent (agentic) and visiting (communal) job incumbents. {‘visiting, part time (‘suits females’), short term, regular and permanent positions’}. Hierarchical system was followed in most of the organizations {e.g. there was a mention of grade system

which reflects organization’s hierarchical systems; ‘18th, 19th, 20th grade, (‘many women are now directors’), ‘director of an ordinary office has 4 to 5 deputy directors,’ ‘management and administration,’ ‘categorize them’). Inefficiency & Complaining behavior was a rampant theme (participants referred to people who were ‘lethargic,’ ‘least bothered about their official duties,’ ‘an attempt to get rid of with assigned curriculum, inefficiencies’). Merit was a value sometime followed (‘criterion was decided, followed the right process, Selection board only has the authority to go through those reports’). Nevertheless, it seems to be compromised in the story where one interviewee told the story of getting his colleagues recruited. There was a pervasive comparison of private sector and public sector jobs, salaries and work. The public sector was related to inefficiencies but offering public service and private sector was associated with high salaries.

5- RELIGIOSITY AND SPIRITUALITY

Lastly, some references were made to God, soul searching, fate and thankfulness. These themes of religiosity and spirituality (conscientiousness) were identified irrespective of gender. Participants were thankful to the creator for the success they had achieved and also for Him making them able to advise others.

The frequency of occurrence of the various themes and the strength of their existence can be easily comprehended in the graph below;

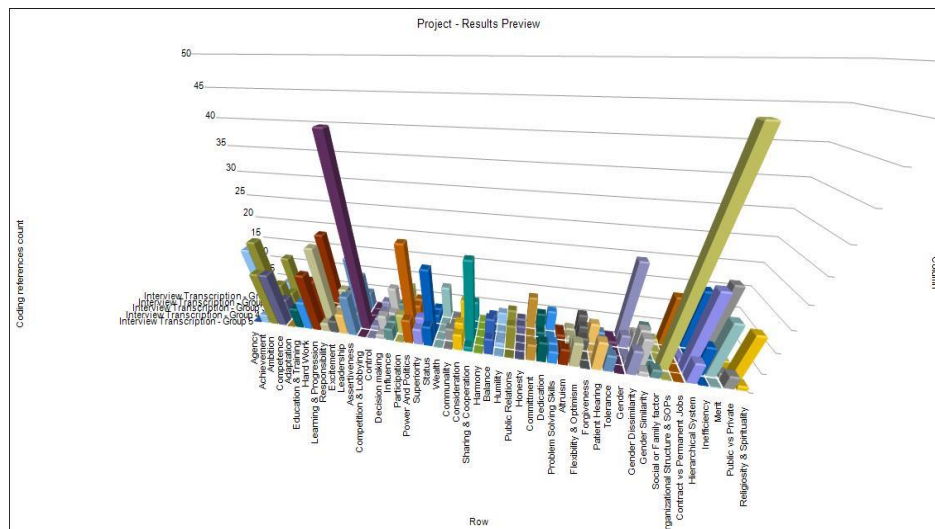


Figure 6 Frequency of Themes

DISCUSSION OF QUALITATIVE RESULTS

This study was an attempt to investigate the agentic and communal traits in men and women, at various employment statuses and hierarchical levels which verified that gender, employment statuses and Bahria University Journal of Management and Technology (BJMT). 2024, Volume 7, Issue 2.

various hierarchical levels have a mixture of agency and communality. However, some new insights were also found regarding organizational structure, gender and spirituality in the qualitative information. The insights generated by the qualitative study are valuable as new dimensions emerged and were analyzed in depth though generalization is not a target of qualitative study.

Finally, the qualitative findings are highly significant to understand the research problem and objectives. The issue, that women in line with their perspective gender norms tend to display more of communal traits in contrast to the display of agentic traits by their male colleagues and reinforce the stereotypical beliefs about their lack of eligibility for employment or leadership positions, is resolved and it can be concluded that for employment or hierarchical position there is required and displayed a combination of agentic and communal traits irrespective of gender. Though, at one or two places males seem to be more agentic but both male and females exhibit agency or communality depending on the context, job or organizational demands, professional roles, cultural or socialization influences which does not reduce their competence or eligibility for employment or leadership position. This is somewhat, not completely, in alignment with the quantitative findings in published literature that there is a difference in agency and gender, but no difference is found between men and women with regard to communality.

The collectivism in Hofstede model is found in Pakistan's context and both genders believe in cooperation and collective problem solving and it is also in alignment with Pakistan's culture. Though, individualistic trends can be seen in the theme of professional competition. Power distance exists in some respects if it is structural demand, but majority of times, the high management is seen to be communicating and sharing in people-oriented matters (qualitative themes refer to agency through power/ politics/ leadership). Discussions and participation occur but there is also a certain level of centralized decision making when a participant talks about the existence of procedures for decision taking and hiring. Masculine orientation of culture exists in respects of aggressive competition and exhibition of competence (discussed under *leadership* theme) though communal (feminine) aspects are also found in helping and counseling of others (*mentoring*).

The comparison with existing literature is interesting when variability is seen. The phenomenon of glass ceiling (Morrison, 1987) seems to be reducing (non-existing) as results confirm that there is no relation of agency or communality with employment status. Similar is verified by qualitative analysis as two of the participants stated that they did not see any discrimination between gender and even women were rising to the leadership positions. Similarly, Role incongruity theory (Agut et. al., 2022; Heilman, 2001), which talks about difference of characteristics possessed and expected at the leadership position, may be true but the results highlight that both genders are equally competent (previous findings find relation of agency with hierarchy but not communality, also, qualitative results exhibit both agency and communality in people holding high positions) in the professional roles, though demands of cultural characteristics and socialization perspectives may be different.

The concept of prejudice towards potential candidates at the time of selection or promotion based on 'descriptive norms' (Baraket et. al., 2023; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Newport, 2001) seems to be reducing as when two respondent indicate that even women are now getting employment chances and they are even becoming chairpersons when compared to men. Similar was the result in previous literature that found no relation of agency (communality) with employment status. The results finds relation of hierarchy and agency but not with communality. On the other hand, through qualitative part, both genders are found being

employed or moving up the hierarchy, in few cases with or without violating ‘prescriptive norms,’ depending on the role being performed (theory of ambiguity of role or norms).

The research question and objectives are adequately answered. First objective relating to the level of agency/ communality in men and women is discussed now. There are many similar communal traits in men and women i.e cooperation, problem solving harmony etc. There are agentic traits found in both men and women though little variations are seen when an interviewee says that men sit for longer hours in office than females to refer to their hard working. This qualitative finding indicates a difference between gender and agency.

Now, second objective relating to the level of agency and employment status should be dealt in detail. There are both agentic and communal traits found in both men and women at their employment status, as a participant claim this indirectly saying that women are now getting employment. Two of the respondents expressed that they did not see any difference between gender during employment. Thus, it can be inferred that they did not suffer from any discrimination on the basis of agency or communality (since they all were working themselves. If there were any distinctions, they wouldn’t have been employed e.g. one female interviewee said that she had worked all her life among men). So, the presence of a level of agency for employment is not the sole factor as communality exists side by side. Keeping in view the contextual and job requirements, there may be exceptions. This qualitative finding clearly indicates there is no relation of employment with the level of agency {An interesting insight is seen if one goes above the immediate objective. The results for communality signify that there is no (gender related) association between communality and employment i.e. people of both genders exhibiting any or both (communal or agentic) traits can be employed}.

Third objective is related to agency and hierarchical level. Both agentic and communal traits are found in men and women at higher hierarchical levels {the same can be inferred for various levels of hierarchy through examining the way seniors referred to their subordinates’ compliance (communal) and a member dissenting on the girl’s picture issue (agency)}. So, it can’t be concluded that agency has an association with hierarchy since communality is equally prevalent in people of both genders. The comment of a participant about women becoming chairpersons like men shows that both genders can competitively display similar traits needed to go up the hierarchy. {An interesting finding is observed if one goes beyond the immediate objective. There is no (gender related) association between communality and hierarchy i.e. people of both genders exhibiting any or both (communal or agentic) traits can rise up in the hierarchy}.

Theoretical Contributions: This study contributes theoretically in the following ways; This research adds the theoretical explanations in the discipline of gender studies and their professional roles, traits and behaviors. The research expands the theory of agency and communality. The research refines the theory pertaining to employment levels and the level of agency and communality. This study generates better insight into hierarchical levels with reference to agency and communality.

Practical Contributions: This can facilitate management and policy practices in various respects through; i) Comprehending the agency and communality according to various genders, employment statuses and hierarchical levels can help develop the human resource and organizational strategies in alignment with them, ii) Regulating the reinforcement, performance measurements and compensations according to the behavior demands, display and roles, iii) This research would facilitate future research.

Global Context: This phenomenon has been the focus of study in various countries where studies on men and women, Whites and Blacks and etc. have been conducted by, e.g., Linda (2001), Eagly (2011) and Livingston etc. There is increased focus on what are the best practices and traits that lead to success in the professional life in this era of competition and globalization.

CONCLUSION

This research study investigated a common phenomenon that men and women are tagged with difference of qualities usually stereotyped with the gender. Also, there are views that gender face different treatments at the time of employment and during stepping up the hierarchical levels. The study aims to investigate whether gender according to the respective norms, employment statuses and hierarchical levels tend to display communal/ agentic traits. Thus, it can be concluded from investigation that there are significant differences in gender with reference to agency but not communality. There is no variation in employment statuses with reference to agency or communality. However, there is an association between hierarchical levels with reference to agency but not communality. Nevertheless, the qualitative part exhibited mixed results also. There are references to some gender similarities and dissimilarities with respect to agency and communality. The employment opportunities are increasing for females which were once confined to men thus, reinforcing that agency and communality divide is blurring. The findings indicate that leadership skills and agentic or communal traits get polished with the learning and experience as one starts from low level and rises to the top in the hierarchy. Both agency and communality are expressed by both genders with few exceptions.

The study is multi-dimensional in some respects; The qualitative information provides an in depth understanding of the phenomenon and also the findings were reconfirmed with one of the interviewees to validate them. This study leads to the comprehension of the concept of how agency and communality are found in the gender, employment status and hierarchical levels as a management, leadership, psychological and social phenomenon.

The study pertains only to the local city. The measurement scale used in research consists of agentic and communal traits and may consider the perceived traits of femininity and masculinity but may not accommodate any changes in the content of gender stereotypes. The study may not have cross border implications. A consideration for qualitative part is the extent to which participants' responses may have been contaminated by self-presentational constraints or contextual demands. The sample for the qualitative part was small and the theoretical saturation might have been compromised. Research can help to evaluate the professional values, objectives and practices that are associated with the promotion of agency and communal preferences.

However, the study shall affect scholarly and future research in the various other sectors and industries ranging from manufacturing to service and technological areas. The agency and communality variation can be studied in public or private sectors. Future research needs to systematically inquire stereotypes and dynamics at various levels of management domains e.g. finance, audit, human resource, and marketing etc. that vary in the representation of men, women in other socio-economic and political attributes and networks etc. There is a wide range of occupations within which agency and communality can be studied at various levels of age and experience of individuals. The future research must include subtle research designs and more sensitive and sophisticated measures that can assess implicit or explicit

associations between gender, employment statuses and hierarchical levels with reference to agency and communality. There is scope for research studies in Eastern, Asian and even Western nations that can address questions about the agency and communality pertaining to roles across various cultures and contexts. It can set an HR policy formulation, evaluation and monitoring research trend with reference to the acquisition, retention and anti-discriminatory aims regarding the agency and communality. Various comparative studies can be pursued in this regard. Further research can address inter-sectionality, whereby the agency and communality variation can be studied in relation to leadership and follower's compliance and dependence on other group memberships (i.e., race, sexual orientation, ethnicity) as well as the strategic objectives, organizational context, vision, formal and informal networks, education, and training.

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