

# Leadership Excellence and Gender in Organizations

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## Female middle management advantage for workforce productivity? A focus on the implementation of high performance work systems

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## ABSTRACT

Research on women in organizational leadership has largely focused on the strategic leadership level, showing that increased female representation can benefit firm performance. However, the firm performance implications of female middle management have been largely neglected. The current study addresses how female middle managers help firms achieve effective performance in the form of workforce productivity, via the implementation of High Performance Work Systems (HPWS). By analyzing the multi-wave (2009, 2011, and 2013) Workplace Panel Survey (WPS) data collected from 1,248 firms in South Korea, we found that a larger proportion of female middle managers in a firm translated into a higher level of workforce productivity, largely due to the greater implementation of HPWS. However, consistent with role congruity theory, this female middle management advantage disappeared in the presence of a lower proportion of female subordinates. The current study makes theoretical contributions to research on gender in management, strategic human resource management, and middle management, and provides practical implications for firm effectiveness and competitive advantage.

**Keywords:** middle manager, gender, strategy implementation, high performance work systems, firm performance