

Original Paper

The Public Sector of Our Country under the Perspective of Rational Choice Institutionalism Study on the Dilemma of Female Occupation "Labyrinth"

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Abstract

With the deepening of the research, the career "labyrinth" has become an appropriate metaphor for the obstacles to career promotion of modern women, and it is particularly obvious in the career of women in the public sector in our country. This paper uses the rational choice institutionalism analysis framework to study the dilemma of female occupation "labyrinth" in Chinese public sector. First of all, the behavior of public sector recruitment policy makers, human resources managers and female employees constitutes the behavioral motivation of the "labyrinth" dilemma. Secondly, the action situation includes the identity attributes of each actor, decision-making control, cost and benefit, which explains the operation mode of the "labyrinth" dilemma. Finally, exogenous variables, including application rules, community attributes and natural material conditions, provide a macro institutional environment for analyzing the "labyrinth" dilemma. On the basis of analyzing the behavior logic of each subject, the specific elements of the action situation and exogenous variables, this paper puts forward the solution and "the right medicine".

Keywords

rational choice institutionalism, the public sector, career "labyrinth"

1. Introduction

The earliest concept that describes the difficulty of promotion for women is the “Glass Ceiling”. Glass Ceiling” was put forward by the column of Wall Street Journal in 1986, and it was first used as “Glass Ceiling” to describe the “artificial invisible barriers” faced by women in the process of promotion, which are difficult to break through. (Liu & Liu, 2015) “which are difficult to break through. The description of “Glass Ceiling” implies that all women are passively confronted with homogenized barriers and can do nothing about it, and it is extremely difficult to break through such barriers. With the support of national policies for women's employment and the gradual recognition of women's achievements in all walks of life, the number of female top managers has also increased, which means that the “ceiling” has gradually been broken, and it is no longer an unbreakable existence. However, against the backdrop of a gradual increase in the number of female leaders at different levels in various fields, the strategic task of gender mainstreaming has not changed after nearly 40 years of development, (Li & Wang, 2016) and the number of female managers is still in the minority, so that the gender equality that we are calling for has not been truly realized. The reason for this is that we have not really discovered the key to women's promotion difficulties, and the “labyrinth” provides a better explanation. “The labyrinth is an image with a complex structure, in which various social patterns (such as gender roles), cultural mechanisms (such as the gender division of labor in the family), and workplace practices (such as role models of ideal employees) are intertwined, and personal bias is one of the obstacles that make up the labyrinth. (Celia, n.d.) The concept of “labyrinth” focuses on the complexity and diversity of objective and subjective factors in the promotion process of women, where difficulties are visible and women have the opportunity to enter leadership positions. Therefore, the “labyrinth” description of the obstacles to women's promotion is more in line with the ecological environment of modern women's promotion in the workplace.

The plight of women's career advancement in the public sector is essentially a microcosm of the gender differences in the entire social economy. Compared with other industries, China's public sector has a relatively large proportion of female senior managers. However, within the public sector, the number of female senior managers is still a minority compared to that of men. Some scholars have pointed out that the ratio of men to women in China's official information database for cadres at the prefecture level and above is approximately 17:1, which reflects the seriousness of gender segregation in the public sector, (Lv, 2022) or more accurately, the “labyrinth” dilemma faced by women in the public sector in the process of promotion. Rational choice institutionalism is often used to solve collective action dilemmas, and it has some advantages in explaining the interaction patterns of women's career advancement in the public sector. On the one hand, the public sector women's “maze” dilemma is more representative of the study of women's “maze” dilemma in the whole society. On the other hand, it is possible to locate the main body of action, policy and other factors more clearly, reduce the influence of variable factors and clarify the logical movement of the public sector women's “maze” dilemma.

2. The Theoretical Framework of Rational Choice Institutionalism

2.1 *Explanation of Rational Choice Institutionalism Theory*

With the combination of rational choice theory and the related theories of new institutionalism economics, rational choice institutionalism was born and gradually became one of the three major schools of new institutionalism. Rational choice theory is based on the “economic man hypothesis”, which attributes the individual's choice to the result of maximizing the interests of the individual in the given environment. Along with the application of Rational Choice Theory in the field of social sciences, some researchers began to reflect on Rational Choice Theory's individualized approach that ignores institutional factors. They have begun to emphasize the importance of institutions and draw relevant concepts in the new institutionalist economic theory to enrich their own theoretical framework and methodology. Strictly speaking, rational choice institutionalism can be divided into several branches from different research perspectives. One of them is the Indiana School branch represented by Ostrom (E), an American scholar who won the Nobel Prize in Economics in 2009, and this model is especially suitable for analyzing public policies. (Wang & Jiang, 2011)

According to Ostrom's institutional analysis framework, it can be seen that the action arena is the key to analyzing the autonomous governance of public ponds, which includes two key elements: actors, and action situations. Among them, actors are the key subjects involved in the overall collective action, who act according to their own preferences in order to maximize their own interests. The action situation, on the other hand, can be thought of as a set, a dependent variable that is jointly influenced and determined by seven independent variables, mainly including the set of participants, the identity of the participants, and the ability of each individual participant to control the decision. In an action situation any one or more categories of rules may be missing, so that the corresponding variables are in a default state without the rules directly constrained (default), (Wang, 2010) and thus different situations of collective action research, the rules within the action situation are different. The action arena does not exist independently, and will be affected by external factors, including natural and material conditions, community attributes, and the application of rules.

2.2 *Adaptability of Rational Choice Institutionalism Theory*

The rational choice institutionalism framework provides basic assumptions for different types of collective action: actors, institutions, and actors' rational responses. Actors are a collection of mutually independent individuals who act in accordance with their preferences by means of rational calculations for the purpose of maximizing their self-interests; institutions are a collection of rules that constrain and regulate the behavior of individual actors in a certain environment; and actors are constrained by the institutions and are able to respond with appropriate behaviors. In collective action, if all individuals are seeking to maximize utility in a rational manner so that they make the most satisfactory decisions, then rationality at the individual level is likely to lead to irrational outcomes at the collective level. (He, 2014) This is because although the arena of action is the same, different actors are affected by different action situations, (FANG, WANG, LUO et al., 2021) which may result in different interest

orientations and thus in rational or irrational outcomes. Therefore, the key to analyzing rational choice institutionalism is what factors contribute to the actors' actions.

Rational choice institutionalism provides a tool for analyzing different types of formal and informal institutions, as well as informal collective action dilemmas. (Kenneth & Cedric, 2017) Thus, the same rational choice institutionalism that applies to public policy analysis is also applicable to analyzing the dilemma of the “maze” of women's careers in the public sector. Based on the above theories, we can construct the structure of the informal action arena of the “public sector women's career maze dilemma”. The actors of public sector women's career advancement are mainly composed of public sector women employees, public sector human resource policy makers, public sector human resource managers, and the result of their collective action based on their respective interests and needs may be irrational - the public sector women's career advancement dilemma. (As shown in Figure 1) This paper, under the perspective of rational choice institutionalism, analyzes the actors and action situations to explain the behavioral motivation of the public sector women's career “labyrinth” dilemma, and then puts forward the strategy to get through the “labyrinth”.

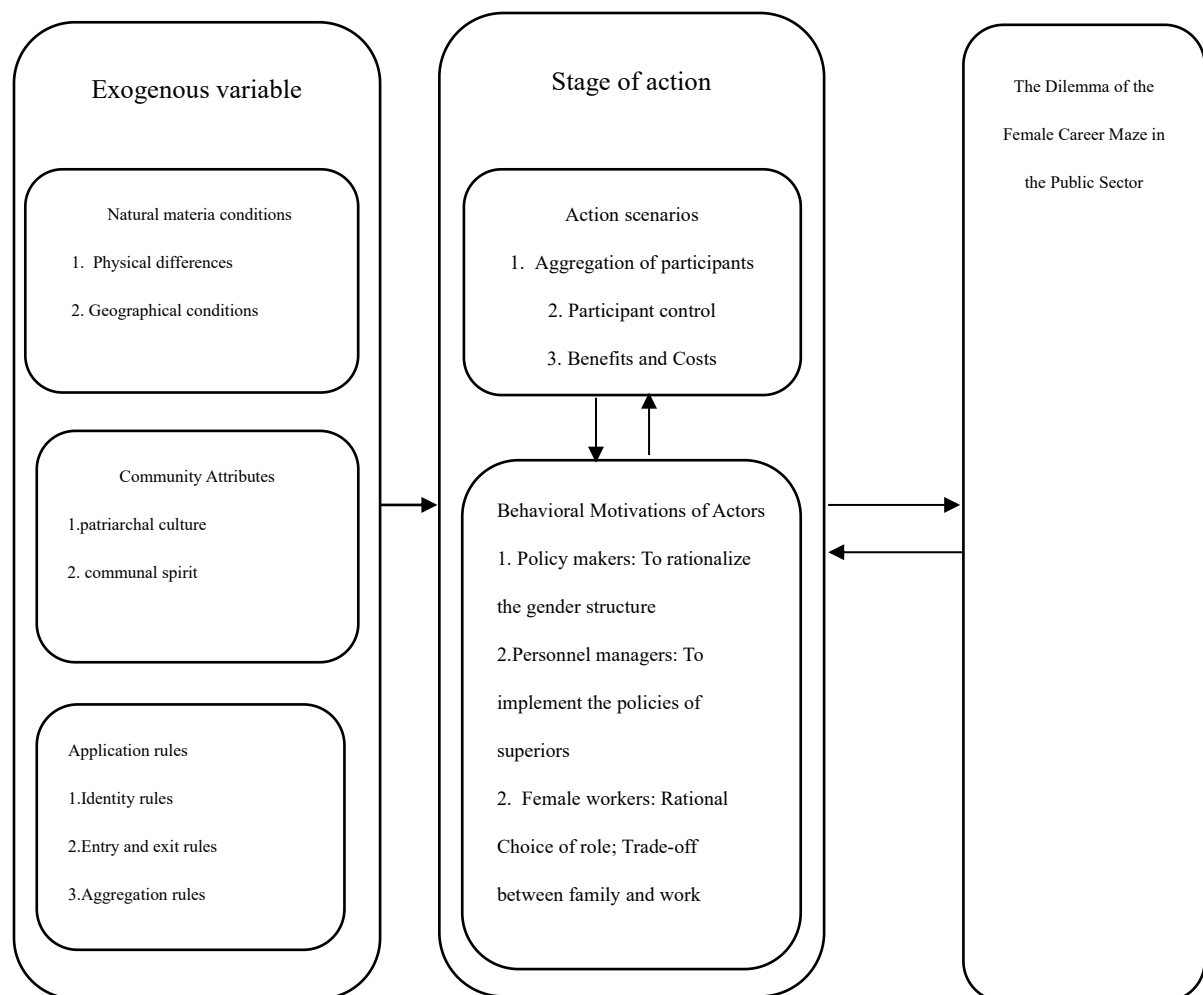


Figure 1. Rational Choice Institutional Framework for Analyzing the Dilemma of the “Maze” of Women's Careers in the Public Sector

3. Analysis of the Causes of the “Labyrinth” of Women's Careers in the Public Sector from the Perspective of Rational-Choice Institutionalism

3.1 Actors and Their Behavioral Motives

As a matter of fact, in the “labyrinth” dilemma of women's careers in the public sector, the main public sector policy maker is the personnel department of the State Council, which is the highest administrative organ of the country. Despite the fact that China has established the basic state policy of gender equality and that nearly 40% of civil servants at the basic level are women, the proportion of female civil servants has gradually declined as their positions have been upgraded. The Central Organization Department, in order to implement the basic state policy of equality between men and women, has formulated a quota system for the selection of female cadres, stipulating that there should be at least one female leading cadre. According to the data, in 2021, the proportion of provincial, municipal and county-level government leadership teams with a full-time female cadre will be 6.5 per cent, 8.4 per cent and 10.6 per cent respectively, and the proportion of provincial, municipal and county-level government departments with a full-time female cadre will be 10.1 per cent, 14 per cent and 12.3 per cent respectively, (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021) a marked improvement over the previous situation, but there is still a serious imbalance in the proportion of men and women in the public sector. In the maze of women's careers in the public sector, the motivation of public sector policymakers is to solve the problem of the serious imbalance in the proportion of women in the top echelons of the public sector, to realize the rationalization of the gender structure of the public sector, and to reduce the phenomenon of occupational gender discrimination.

Human resource managers in the public sector mainly refer to the human resource management departments at all levels within the public sector, and they play the role of decision-makers in the maze of women's careers in the public sector. Acting on the basis of rational preference, human resource departments at all levels have two contradictory tendencies in the process of appointing and dismissing leading cadres. On the one hand, in order to implement the national policy of equality between men and women, a quota system for the selection of female cadres has been implemented, and the work of training and selecting female cadres has been strengthened. On the other hand, human resource management departments, in order to maximize the interests of their own departments, tend to select leaders on the basis of the stereotype that men are more capable than women, that they have a physiological advantage over women, or for reasons such as reducing labor costs. This tendency has led to deviations in the implementation of the quota system, and some local governments have gradually turned the quota system into a system of “selecting only one female leader”, which has led to the erroneous implementation of the minimum requirement as the maximum requirement. In some places, the selection of female cadres has turned into the fulfillment of a target or a ratio; and the “first selection of female cadres” in departments has evolved into the “only suitable deployment” of female cadres as leaders in those departments. (Lv, 2020) Although the proportion of women in the public sector has increased, it is only symbolically close to “gender equality”. The biased implementation of

the policy has resulted in the reduction of promotion opportunities for women and has shackled them to a fixed sector of work, reducing their opportunities to choose other areas of work.

Women in the public sector, which includes women employees at all levels of government, often have preferences for action based on rational choices of their roles, which are subject to multiple conflicts. From the viewpoint of epiphenomenal conflicts, women in the public sector not only have to be a good employee in their position, but also have to be a good mother and lover at home. Under the pressure of such multiple roles, many women choose the latter according to their own rationality. In addition, women have to take care of their families as well as consider their work, thus feeling the scarcity of time and energy much more strongly than men. From the viewpoint of implicit conflict, influenced by traditional culture, both the family and the society and even women themselves position women in a certain preconceived setting and do not believe that women can show their talents in the workplace. As a result, some women may cater to family concepts in order to seek harmony in family relationships. From the perspective of society as a whole, patriarchy is deeply entrenched in all areas of society and its effects are becoming more severe. Walbey's public patriarchy points out that women, even when they enter the public sphere, remain segregated from wealth, power and status. (Walby, 1990) Thus, in the context of patriarchy, women in the public sector are sometimes forced to make more family-oriented choices.

3.2 Analysis of the Action Situation

Sets of Participants. Participants are actors in the framework of rational choice institutionalism, and the contribution of different sets of participants to collective action varies. The Ministry of Personnel of the State Council, as a policy maker, needs to formulate policies to promote the promotion of female employees in order to promote the relative balance of the gender structure in the public sector, and at the same time provide corresponding financial and talent support. Human resource managers in the public sector mainly refer to human resource management departments at all levels, whose task is to implement the policies formulated by the Ministry of Personnel of the State Council, and need to make efforts to carry out the relevant policies in all aspects of the selection, training, employment, retention and promotion of civil servants. In this process, female public sector workers need to have the professionalism and business ability, sufficient time and energy, strong beliefs and perseverance to be able to lead.

Participant control. Participant control over collective action refers to the amount of decision-making power that a collection of actors have in the implementation of a decision. In the public sector women's career labyrinth, the Ministry of Personnel of the State Council is the direct decision-maker, can most directly formulate relevant policies to promote the promotion of women in the public sector; public sector human resources managers at all levels as the implementation of the policy, its main task is to implement the policies formulated by the higher levels, in the implementation of women's promotion policies have a certain degree of discretion, and the need to reflect to the superiors The promotion of women cadres in the public sector. Women in the public sector do not have decision-making power in

the process of women's career promotion, but only through the enhancement of their own ability, passive hope to be valued by the relevant departments and thus have the opportunity to be promoted. Benefits and costs. In the process of policy formulation and implementation, it is necessary for the actors to pay certain costs in order to get the corresponding benefits. First, in the process of promoting women in the public sector, policymakers need to give specific human resources management departments appropriate financial and human resources support in order to obtain high-level female talent, achieve gender balance in the public sector and maintain social stability. Secondly, human resource management departments at all levels within the public sector need to overcome the influence of public patriarchy and pay more attention to women's promotion throughout the entire process of human resource management, so as to ensure a smooth path for women's promotion and improve the quality of leadership. Finally, if women in the public sector can get out of the "maze" of promotion, they will get higher wages, improved social status, and recognition of their ability level. However, they need to pay more costs, such as making more efforts to balance family and work, sacrificing time and energy for child care, perseverance, and overcoming the stereotypes of women under the patriarchal system.

3.3 Analysis of Exogenous Variables

Natural and material conditions are the objective independent variables, and all the structures of the action arena are based on natural and material conditions, and this paper mainly refers to the gender characteristics of women and the influence of different geographical environments on the careers of women in the public sector. On the one hand, women are physiologically different from men, and women are often subjected to a "birth penalty" at work, which affects their level of education, the amount of time they dedicate to their work, and their opportunities for career advancement and development. In terms of personality, women are naturally more emotional and detail-oriented than men, and although this is not a direct cause, it also affects the promotion process. On the other hand, different geographical conditions influence the promotion process of women in the public sector. The gender ratio in the public sector shows a pattern of "disequilibrium" between cities, towns and villages, with a tendency to become more and more serious in each order. There are obvious differences in women's education level, awareness of political participation and traditional gender concepts in different regions, and the more remote the region, the more women lack the conditions and awareness to engage in public administration.

Community attributes are the characteristics and social attributes of the communities in which the resources of the public pond are located, and in the "labyrinth" dilemma of women's careers in the public sector, the public sector is essentially a community in the resources of the public pond. In terms of society as a whole, patriarchal cultural stereotypes are still deeply entrenched, and the idea that "men should be in charge of the outside world and women should be in charge of the inside world" still has a profound impact on society as a whole. This idea of male dominance in the family and in society also exists in the public sector, and it has given rise to a series of one-sided evaluations, such as the inability

of women to be good leaders and the higher value of men. Within the public sector, the public sector pays more attention to realizing the public interest than the private sector, and public sector employees are required to have the spirit of serving the public and devote more energy to their work. The requirements for leaders are even more stringent, requiring them to have strong psychological qualities and working ability, and even more comprehensive leadership ability to lead the team to do practical work.

Application rules are a set of exogenous variables that directly affect the action situation and are most likely to change, and they are rules and norms used to constrain people's behavior in the decision-making process, usually including seven types of variables, such as identity rules, boundary rules, selection rules, aggregation rules and scope rules. According to the importance of these seven types of variables in the public sector women's promotion "labyrinth" dilemma, the following mainly analyzes the identity rules, entry and exit rules and aggregation rules. First of all, the public sector women's career "maze" dilemma mainly involves three types of identities: public sector policy makers, public sector human resource managers, and public sector female employees. The number of the three is determined by the requirements of public sector human resource management development, and the relationship between them is a top-down behavioral interaction mode. Secondly, entry-exit rules, which regulate how actors enter as well as exit the arena of action, are the main elements of boundary rules. Public sector policy makers and human resource managers are always present in the process of public sector women's promotion, and the entry and exit mechanisms of public sector women employees are more clearly defined. From the point of view of the entry mechanism for the promotion of women in the public sector, the leading cadres need to have strong overall qualities and be recommended or nominated by their superiors. In terms of the exit mechanism, there are two scenarios: one is removal from office due to accountability, which means that the person removed from office will no longer hold the original position and will be transferred out. The second is removal from a post because the person has reached the required retirement age, or because the person has been in a leadership position for more than the maximum number of years of service in the post. Finally, the arena of action in the "maze" of women's careers in the public sector is affected by an asymmetric aggregation of rules. Policymakers have direct decision-making power, and the policies they formulate are implemented by human resources managers in the public sector, ultimately affecting women in the public sector.

4. Suggestions for Navigating the "Labyrinth" of Women's Careers

First, promote the formulation of effective public policies in the public sector. Formal public policies tend to be more binding on society. First, public policymakers should study the promotion paths for women in the public sector, analyze the relevant policies already in place, and make up for the shortcomings on the basis of existing laws and policies, such as adjusting the quota system for female cadres. Secondly, by studying foreign cases in guaranteeing women's employment rights and interests and formulating corresponding laws and regulations in conjunction with the actual situation of China's

public sector, they should pay attention to gender differences in a real sense and reduce the adverse consequences. Once again, a sound monitoring mechanism for gender equality should be established in the public sector's human resources management to ensure the effectiveness of policy implementation. Otherwise, even if the policy is well formulated and reasonable, it will not be able to achieve the expected results. Just as the original intention of the quota system is to ensure that women in the public sector can have more opportunities to reach the top, but the final result is even running in the opposite direction. Finally, in today's patriarchal system almost dominant background, the whole society's thinking is deeply rooted, the need to formulate appropriate gender protection policy, adhere to the social principles of fairness and justice, subtle influence on people's mindset.

Secondly, establish a reasonable human resource management system. In the life cycle of a policy, implementation is a crucial part, an effective way to realize the purpose of the policy and to solve the problems raised in the policy. (Walby, 1990) Human resources managers at all levels in the public sector, as the implementers of the policy, should optimize the human resources management system to ensure a smooth career advancement path for women in the public sector. Firstly, they should reduce the restrictions on female candidates in the recruitment of civil servants, adjust the gender ratio of grass-roots civil servants, and rationally optimize the entry mechanism of civil servants. Secondly, targeted training plans should be formulated to provide a platform for improving the comprehensive quality of female civil servants, thereby enhancing their core competitiveness in promotion. Most importantly, policies on gender equality should be strictly implemented, and a fair and impartial appraisal system should be set up to give them equal opportunities for promotion and enhance the motivation of female civil servants.

Thirdly, female civil servants should enhance their own abilities. Regardless of changes in the external environment, women in the public sector need to rely on their own strengths to develop the ability to adapt to changes in the external environment, so as to be recognized by society and to possess the excellent qualities that make them qualified for the position of women cadres. Firstly, they should break the psychological implication that "men are stronger than women", raise the awareness of safeguarding women's legitimate rights and interests, respond to work with a positive mindset, and overcome the profound influence of "patriarchy" on society. Secondly, they should improve their business and leadership skills. In the political arena, they need to have excellent skills and practice hard in order to make a breakthrough in politics and make a difference in their careers. Third, to harmonize the relationship between family and work, seize promotion opportunities in time, and make reasonable planning for their career development.

5. Conclusion

This paper takes rational choice institutionalism as the theoretical basis, takes public sector policy makers, public sector human resource managers and public sector female employees as actors, analyzes the behavioral motives and interaction patterns of actors in the public sector women's career "labyrinth"

dilemma, and explores the collection of actors in the action arena, the control of decision-making, the benefits and costs, and so on. It also explores the set of actors in the arena of action, the control of decision-making, the benefits and costs, and other elements. Subject to historical and practical constraints, including natural and material conditions, communal attributes, and rules of application, actors behave differently according to their own preferences, producing irrational outcomes in collective action, for which Rational Choice Institutionalism provides the analytical tool. Such irrational outcomes constrain the effectiveness of human resource management in the public sector, impede the career development of women in the public sector, and, in fact, fail to operationalize the development orientation of gender equality. Therefore, the study of the “labyrinth” requires the coordination of three types of actors: public sector policymakers, public sector human resources managers and public sector women workers, so as to optimize the results of the interactions between the three, improve the career paths of women in the public sector, and lead to the real equality between men and women.

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