



WOMEN IN MANAGEMENT: A DEVELOPING PRESENCE

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Abstract

Women in management, today are performing important tasks but very few have advanced to the top echelons of corporate power. Work place policies have adjusted somewhat towards accommodating women managers, but they have not produced a situation that most observers would label as equal for women and men. Yet avenues for positive changes do exist. Women have to recognise and develop their inherent qualities and innate skills to satisfy the future knowledge world. Self empowerment appears to be the answer for women managers.

Current Scenario

It may be the decade of women, but they hold less than 2% of senior management positions worldwide and just 1% in Asia. According to a United Nation study, women have to wait until the 25th century – 2490 to be precise - before they can achieve parity with men in the top echelons of corporate power. Asian women are “a long way from utopia” says Andrew Brynes an Associate Professor of Law at the University of Hong Kong. Only in Philippines and Singapore do women have a

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significant share, between a quarter and two fifths of administrative and managerial jobs (Jang, 1999).

For women in management the constraints and challenges are indeed great. Management is still very much a male domain. Today working women need to excel in a world hitherto dominated by male managers. Although there has been no better time for women to move into management, Fannie Hurst's remark that "A woman needs to be twice as good as a man to go half as far" still holds good (Hurst, 1993).

What holds women back? Barriers to Career Development:

Lack of role models:

Only 2% of women hold senior management positions worldwide. Women are still numerically disadvantaged in management.

Feeling of Isolation:

Isolation is common among women in management positions. Often they may be the only women in a roomful of males and have no female counterparts. According to many studies, women in management positions (particularly senior management) are lonely (Davidson and Cooper, 1983, Powell, 1988).

Stereotypes:

Combating stereotypes is one of the biggest hurdles for serious women managers who face subtle, although not always intentional, discrimination from men who have been socialised to think of them as wives, sweethearts, daughters, and secretaries – but not as professional equals. If she works under a male boss there is a tendency of being regarded first as a woman and then as a worker. In 1975 Broverman et al noted that men held a stereotyped perception of woman as:

Dependent
Passive
Non-competitive
Illogical
Less competent
Less objective

By clinging on to stereotypic beliefs about women – such as women prefer secure, low risk jobs - which may be true for some women but cannot be generalised to others, Organizations underutilize the potential of women managers.

Glass Ceiling Effect:

The “glass ceiling effect”, a term coined by Ann Morrison, author of ‘Breaking through the Glass Ceiling’ refers to a transparent barrier or subtle discrimination against women’s mobility. The glass ceiling impedes women from moving up to senior management because they are women. According to Morrison and her colleagues, the glass ceiling “is not simply a barrier for an individual, based on the person’s inability to handle a higher level job. Rather the glass ceiling applies to women as a group who are kept from advancing higher because they are women” (Morrison, 1992).

Old-Boy Network Still Strong:

The biggest barrier to women in top management levels is the ‘bunch of guys sitting together around a table’ making all the decisions. In short, when deciding whom to promote to management, male corporate leaders tend to select people as much like themselves as possible – so it is no surprise that women are frequently not even considered at promotion time. Women executives are frequently excluded from social activities and often describe the “clubbiness” among the man that exists at the top. The corporate executive suites are “the ultimate boys club”. In a 1987 survey of women by Advance Research Management Consultants “Old boy networks” - power cliques of male executives at the top of organizations - were one of the three most cited forms of professional discrimination.

Family Role Responsibilities:

Conflicts with family and home responsibilities keep executive women from going to the top. Often the informal activities are beyond the working hours and are of great importance in corporate life. Generally, business is transacted to a great extent in informal meetings in clubs and golf courses. Women are denied access to the informal network due to their pre-occupation with family obligations and cultural constraints (Sundar, 2002). The elite business culture is unfavorable for women in a developing society. Often business dinners are held in clubs without inviting women executives.

Role Ambiguity

Historically the position of executives or managers has been under the domain of men folk. The position of an executive is vested with prestige, power and authority and men were considered as the natural incumbents of such positions. Under the changing conditions, women are taking up the positions of executives or managers. The new demands lead to ambiguity between traditional Indian feminine roles and the new role of the manager. There is often an inconsistency between the nature and the structure of the new occupational role of women managers and the traditional Indian cultural values. In Indian Society, men and women are isolated from each other. But the professional role demands that they interact with each other. This creates an ambiguous relationship. If women are reserved, stern and strict, they are labeled as harsh and unfriendly. If women are courteous they are mistaken to be interested in men (Sundar, 2002).

Job Segregation Runs Rampant

Just as the overall labour market remains sharply segregated by sex, women executives are concentrated into certain types of job – mostly staff and support jobs – that offer little opportunity for getting to the top. A 1986 wall street survey found that the highest ranking women in most industries are in non-operating areas such as personnel, public relations or occasionally finance, specialties that seldom lead to the most powerful top-management posts.

Reasons for Increasing Presence of Women in Management

In recent years, women's representation in corporations has increased dramatically. Women in management today are holding responsible positions. There is no doubt that entry to these jobs is extremely competitive. Women have entered the portals of premier institutions alongside their male colleagues to pursue career in professional management. Entry of more and more capable women will help to eliminate the social skepticism about the progress of women. Changes in the mindset of society about the efficiency of women in high profile management jobs can be brought about only with entry of more women into these jobs.

Education

In 1977, UNESCO pointed out that one of the three major causes for women's inferior position in society is the inequality between men and women in access to education. Education gives men claim to extra superiority. During the recent years, literacy rate among women has increased considerably. Educated young girls and married women are now aspiring and competing for different positions with men. Women are increasing their share of leadership posts in the corporate world.

Changing Attitude and Mindset:

More urban women are aspiring for careers outside home by equipping themselves with the right type of education. They work not because they have to, but because they like to. Bands (1992) reports that "women are planning for careers they plan to pursue for the rest of their lives". Implicit in the concept of career advancement is that women are no longer satisfied to stay in low-paying entry level positions, especially when coupled with the economic reality that most families require dual income to meet their goals.

The Competitive Advantage

Economic and demographic arguments dominated discussion about the need for more women in management from the 1980s. The business community simply cannot afford not to tap women as valuable source for management. Better use of women enhances productivity and efficiency and makes business more competitive in the global community.

Opportunity Cost of Prejudice

The opportunity cost of prejudice – of rejecting women and limiting it to selection of men - is much higher today than in previous economic environment. The extremely competitive environment forces global firms to select the best people available irrespective of gender. "Today no company can afford to waste valuable brainpower simply because its wearing a skirt" (Fisher, 1992).

Globalization

By hiring women, global companies act as role models for firms in many countries, which local firms would not. American firms generally hire local managers. In Japan, they have led the way in hiring well qualified women whereas Japanese firms are still reluctant to hire them (Steinhoff and Tanaka, 1994). The outstanding success of the initial group of women expatriate managers in all geographical areas – Africa, America, Asia and middle east – is encouraging firms both to continue sending women abroad and to promote more local women into managements.

Non-traditional Management

Recently women have been identified as potentially better suited than men to run the companies of nineties, which require transformational leadership. Helgasen (1990) in her book "The female advantage" suggests that women's superior

management should earn them the designation of the 'new Japanese'. Whereas structural hierarchies characterize traditional organizations, modern organisations are characterised by network of equals. The clear need to abandon traditional management practices based only on authority is imposed by the organisation and has resulted in a trend toward flattened organisations and 'centrarchies' versus hierarchies. Women work particularly well in such situations.

The Feminine Leadership Argument

A new theme heard recently in the discourse over women in management is the call for feminine leadership (Fossan 1989, Loden 1985). Those very female characteristics traditionally believed to disqualify women from management are currently lauded as particularly appropriate for meeting new management challenges. Academics, consultants and managers themselves proclaim the "new qualities" needed for management today, linking them explicitly to the strengths they believe are characteristic of women: cooperativeness and the ability to integrate people, to listen to them and to motivate them.

Leadership style

The new women in management are plainly demonstrating that it is not only possible to get to the top as a woman, but bringing feminine talents and attitudes to the industrial scene is actually an asset. Women are found to be adopting a more democratic and participative style, which is more effective in management working. They can enhance managers and employees satisfaction with their jobs through democratic participation, open discussion of the benefits of discretion and choice. Women managers exercise authority and they share board information, resources and opportunity.

Transformational Outcome

Feminist management can transform the corporation. A corporation run by feminist principles would oppose the exploitation of employees and environment. Management researchers are of the opinion that a value on community welfare – and the collective would foster concern with making the corporation a more habitable, hospitable and equitable work environment.

Corporate Support

Already several U.S. Corporations like IBM, Apple Computer, Du Pont, and Coco Cola Inc have clear women friendly policies. Since 1971, the number of US employers who provide some day care help has grown from 11 to over 5000. In India, organizations have started providing day-care facilities.

Women, like any minority group need to come out of their shell of constraints and blame-laying, and explore a whole new world of possibilities leveraging their inherent strength. Nature has provided women with some very positive qualities like patience, resilience, high emotional intelligence, focus and intuition to survive; these qualities have helped man to build families and *in turn* societies. These very qualities known as "soft skills" in today's management parlance are necessary to build families of knowledge workers at the futuristic corporate world. Women have to recognize and develop their inherent qualities and innate skills to satisfy the future knowledge world's much sought after leadership requirement. Women have a great role to play. Many of the women in various corporate positions have proved that women managers and entrepreneurs have brought in refreshing changes in work approach and style while improving financial or non-financial performance. No doubt women have a daunting task ahead. However, a "can-do" attitude, a helping hand from successful women to other women colleagues and raising the continuous education and on job performance level will certainly quicken the pace for many women to occupy coveted positions in the corporate world.

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