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INFORMATION PAPER

Human Resource Management

**THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE AGE OF
HUMAN ORIENTED MANAGEMENT**

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Information Paper

HUMAN RESOURCE MANGEMENT

The Role of Women in the Age of Human Oriented Management

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Introduction

The past several decades have brought enormous changes that have in turn shaped the development of the modern business environment. The present data clearly indicates that management in general has become much more human-oriented, even in the face of some incredible advancement in technology. As a result, scholars and professionals alike have recognized the need for people with better 'soft' skills that include communicating, networking, empowering, delegating, and counselling among others. Such skills are absolutely imperative for managers in organizations that concentrate primarily on the human factor. In fact, in many areas of management, and especially in HRM, managers that are able to successfully seek out, recruit, train, and manage employees are the ones in highest demand (Fisher et al., 2003). Recently, many authors have suggested that women do possess those skills and therefore tend to perform better than men in the age of human-oriented management. Scholars have identified and emphasized many of the advantages that women display in managing the workforce in order to support the argument that more females should claim high managerial positions. According to Peter York, a well-known academic in the area of human-oriented management, managing has to become a lot more female in the future (York, 1999). As the author and others like him maintain, the 'old' Taylorist style of management is now a thing of the past. Therefore, companies should concentrate resources on finding the most qualified female managers and putting them in key leadership roles. These women would lead their subordinates using a different style that relies more on sharing of responsibility and cooperation than on pure authority. The argument of these academics is that organizational performance would improve significantly as a result. However, there are also those who oppose York and his supporters.

Many believe that such generalizations regarding women are, at the very least, inappropriate. This may be the case since most studies are somewhat biased and do not represent a completely accurate depiction of the current situation. For example, most women that have been identified as successful managers have come from 'privileged' social backgrounds (Gerard, 1999). In addition, the claim that nearly all females tend to use the same 'transformational' style of management is simply not factual. Therefore, one must be careful when evaluating the position of York regarding the role of women in management today. However, by setting some clear criteria concerning the importance of more women attaining higher managerial positions, it is possible to examine the advantages and disadvantages of human-oriented management that is likely to become more female in the future.

Background Information

When considering the role of women in today's human-oriented management, it is important to analyze some important background information. In fact, beginning by examining the inherent differences between men and women seems appropriate in order to better understand the current divide that exists in business today. It is widely known from disciplines such as organizational behaviour and interpersonal communication that men and women do behave and communicate differently (Hartley, 2004). Many authors have exerted considerable effort in order to clarify those issues and, at least to a degree, they have succeeded.

According to existing theories, men and women do communicate differently, which in turn has effect on their values and their preferred styles of management (Robbins, 2003). For instance, men most often focus on achieving results above all, while women care mostly about feelings and relationships. These preferences exist both in their personal lives as well as their professional undertakings. In fact, female preferences affect their selected style of management to a greater degree than that of males. And while not all women prefer sharing of responsibility, cooperation, empowerment, and delegation, many do promote their application as managers and highly-ranked executives (Tomkiewicz and Bass, 2003). From such practices, one can easily recognize their innate attributes of mothers that they often display at their workplace. This also seems to have effect upon some other preferences that women reveal in general. For example, scholars have established that females do not demonstrate such strong desire to pursue power positions as men do.

Women managers have a different set of values that puts much greater emphasis on their role of mothers and care givers. In fact, these are some of the reasons for female under-representation in senior ranks of management (Fisher et al., 2003). Others include the existing 'glass ceiling' of prejudice and negative attitudes that exists in many countries. Many women do not have the ability to grow in the hierarchy simply because of such traditions being established in society (Crampton and Mishra, 1999). Moreover, in many countries such as China, India, and Japan, cultural issues have not allowed females to enjoy the status of men in the business environment (Budhwar, P. et al., 2005; Cooke, 2005; Yuasa, 2005). Finally, lack of support from governments and businesses has thus far discouraged many women to even consider the opportunities for career advancement in high levels of management. And while the situation has improved somewhat in the past decades, women are in general heavily under-represented in upper management. Women have just recently begun to join the ranks of top managers in large numbers. For instance, in the 1970s in the United States only 15 percent of all managers were women. By 1989 this figure had risen to more than 40 percent. By 1995, women made up about 63 percent of the total work force. However, only six percent of females are now classified as middle level managers. Currently, only three of every one hundred top jobs in the largest U.S. companies are held by women (Crampton and Mishra, 1999). These statistics clearly show that programs for evaluating, training, and promoting the most qualified females have become a necessity.

Advantages of Female Managers

Indeed, a considerable gap has been discovered between the number of men and women claiming positions in top management throughout the globe. The reasons behind it have been identified and briefly summarized. It has also been noted that the situation has somewhat improved over the past decades. Here, it is important to return to Peter York's argument about management becoming more female in order to justify the notion that it is worth it to promote efforts aimed at identifying and preparing female managers in increasing numbers (York, 1999). The fact is that many authors have been very assertive about the advantages that female managers possess over their male counterparts. According to proponents of this argument, women are better leaders and managers than men, and they will soon begin to forge ahead in business (Johnson, 2000).

One commonly-stated reason among those supporters is that females are better qualified for work in today's era of human-oriented management. In fact, women are praised and admired by some chief executives for their relative indifference to status symbols and office politics, their innovative ways of thinking, their service industry know-how, their higher intellectual achievements and greater productivity, as well as their more stereotypically appreciated 'soft' skills, such as communication and networking (Johnson, 2000). Other commonly appreciated advantages of women include their caring nature, their preference for teamwork and cooperation, their accessibility, their ability to motivate others, and their intuition. All of these attributes, many of which can be considered innate, have allowed many female managers to excel in their work and even outperform men in traditionally male-dominated businesses. Overall, women seem better prepared to exercise transformational management, placing emphasis upon motivation and support. This type of leading seems to be working well today in an era of human-oriented management. In addition, traditional human resource management functions seem to be well-suited for females, due to the fact that humans are usually the central focus of HRM (Harel et al., 2003). Actually, more and more businesses are recognizing these advantages of women managers. And despite still representing a minority in the highest ranks or management, women can be proud of some success stories. Some female managers have been selected to the executive boards in various multinational companies and some have even rose to the rank of Chief Executive Officer. One such example is Carly Fiorina, the former CEO of Hewlett-Packard. Other such successes have been happening as well in businesses around the globe. More and more women have been promoted in China, India, Russia, and the countries of Eastern Europe (Chirikova and Krichevskaja, 2002; Gvozdeva and Gerchikov, 2002).

Disadvantages of Female Managers

Yet, in spite of the numerous advantages that many female managers possess over men, they do have some disadvantages as well. First of all, women are often criticized for being less ambitious than men. Certainly, this does not hold true for all female managers, but some do tend to display this characteristic. This can perhaps be explained by the fact that women's priorities tend to differ from those of men, and they usually would not pursue a goal at any cost. Females are often seen as more timid than men. In fact, this relates to the concept of femininity, and might well be related to the traditional view of women. In business, however, shyness is more often viewed as a liability rather than an asset (Johnson, 2000). Furthermore, female managers are criticized because of their wishes to often sacrifice their entire careers in the name of raising children and keeping a family together. It is indeed quite difficult for many women that do choose to both work and raise their kids (Doherty, 2004). Yet, the attitudes toward such efforts are often negative in the workplace, as male managers see this as lack of commitment to the job (Linehan and Walsh, 2000). Another major disadvantage of females seeking promotion in managerial positions is their often limited or lacking education and training. The fault for this is, in most instances, shared by society because of the past trends to discourage women from obtaining higher education and specialization. Fortunately, today this trend has been reversed and in countries such as the United Kingdom, females obtain more than 50 percent of all university degrees awarded. Lastly, females tend to dislike competition more than men, which in business can be a seri-

ous disadvantage (Thompson and Marley, 1999). In summary, because of the weaknesses that women sometimes demonstrate, organizations should aim at carefully evaluating both the advantages and the drawbacks of hiring females and promoting them to the highest ranks of their business. In fact, it is sensible that enterprises cautiously identify the actual skills and talents of their prospective employees before offering them work opportunities. Because at the end, an organization would benefit the most from a balanced workforce that consists of various people of both genders that possess the necessary skills to drive the business forward to success (Metz and Tharenou, 2001).

Conclusions

After carefully analyzing the existing background information as well as the advantages and disadvantages of women managers in a number of countries and industries, it is necessary to formulate and evaluate some important conclusions. First of all, it should be noted that no generalizations are completely accurate and therefore should be avoided. In this regard, the argument of Peter York that management should become more female in the future can be attacked in a number of ways for not holding true (York, 1999). This is the case because not all females tend to employ the same style of managing their subordinates. The claim maintained by many authors that all females utilize transformational management is not true, because many use the more autocratic transactional style instead. Furthermore, considering all women on an equal basis regarding their upbringing and talents and abilities is wrong. For instance, one must realize that many successful women managers have started from families with good social status (Gerard, 1999). Consequently, others that have not been so fortunate and have not attained high leadership roles should not be labelled unsuccessful for this reason. Actually, the facts reveal that females of various social backgrounds, but mostly those who possess real talent and skills, have found realization in a number of careers and industries. The situation varies from country to country, and North America and Western Europe still lead the way in terms of female representation in high managerial positions (McDonald, 2004). However, even in the most developed economies, women still lag far behind men in the managerial hierarchy. The reasons for this are various, ranging from the so called 'glass ceiling' of prejudice and negative attitudes to the cultural aspects regarding women's role in society (Crampton and Mishra, 1999). Yet, numerous attempts are being made in order to promote female advancement in managerial positions throughout the world. Initiatives have been developed that involve mentoring programs as well as women-only training seminars (Lewis and Fagenson, 1995; Vinnicombe and Singh, 2003). These have been designed in order to identify the most capable female managers and promote them to higher positions, all in the name of improving organizational performance in various industries. What seems to be most important of all is that the much-needed balance has to be established and maintained. On one hand, scholars and professionals must stop the speculations and begin to recognize talent and skills not based on gender but on true managerial qualities and business acumen (Claes, 1999). On the other, companies and organizations should continue to promote female managers that do display the necessary skills and abilities to higher managerial positions. Thus, by combining women's natural business advantages with those of men, enterprises will get closer to the immensely important balanced workforce that is the key to good organizational performance.

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