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What lies beyond the glass ceiling?

The glass cliff and the potential precariousness of women's leadership positions

Michelle Ryan and Alex Haslam



Michelle Ryan is an Academic Fellow in the School of Psychology at the University of Exeter. Alex Haslam is a Professor of Psychology at the University of Exeter and Chief Editor of the *European Journal of Social Psychology*. Their research is currently funded by the European Social Fund and the Research council of the UK.

Shattering the glass ceiling

“The glass ceiling” is often used to describe the invisible barrier that women face as they attempt to climb the corporate ladder. In the 20 years since the coining of the phrase by the *Wall Street Journal*, attempts to redress this gender balance have occupied managers, HR professionals, and policy-makers, and the understanding of the processes involved has been a keen area of research for academics. While the glass ceiling clearly still exists, with women continuing to be greatly under-represented in leadership roles, the number of women reaching management positions is greater than ever before. But how successful are the women that take on these positions, and what kinds of positions are they achieving?

Women's increasing visibility in managerial roles has led many to ask how well they are suited to these roles. There are those that celebrate the benefits associated with gender diversity, such as the “unique abilities” female managers bring to the table. However, other accounts are not as optimistic. Indeed, the business section of *The Times* in London concluded that rather than having positive outcomes for business, “the triumphant march of women into the country's boardrooms has wreaked havoc on companies' performance and share prices”.

In direct response to claims of havoc, we have launched a program of research that moves away from focusing on leadership style and the outcomes of women's management. Instead, we examine the types of positions that women leaders are likely to achieve and the conditions under which women are appointed to leadership roles. In doing so, our research has revealed that women tend to be appointed to leadership positions under different circumstances than men.

The precariousness of the glass cliff

Our initial research focused on FTSE 100 companies in the UK, providing an in-depth examination of their share-price performance both before and after the appointment of male and female board members. A clear pattern of results was found suggesting that women were likely to be appointed to the boards of companies that had experienced consistently poor performance in the preceding months. Men, on the other hand, were likely to be appointed to companies with relatively stable past performance. Further, in contrast to conclusions reached in previous analyses (such as those reported in *The Times*), we found that the appointment of a woman to the board was not associated with declining company performance. Indeed, female board appointments actually led to a marked increase in company share price.

Our research suggests that a key variable in understanding how women are likely to perform in a given role is to examine the types of positions women tend to occupy. Indeed, our

analyses revealed that women were more likely than men to be placed in leadership positions in companies that are already performing poorly. Extending the metaphor of the “glass ceiling” we suggest that women are more likely than men to find themselves on a “glass cliff”, such that their positions of leadership tend to be associated with an increased risk of failure. Such positions, then, are likely to be somewhat precarious, with women leaders at risk of being blamed for negative events set in motion long before their appointment.

What is going on?

While identifying the glass cliff extends our understanding of what occurs beyond the glass ceiling, we must also consider why is it that women tend to occupy such positions. One way in which to understand these processes is to talk to those who have experienced glass cliff positions. To this end we conduct case-studies and interviews with women. Analyses of these experiences suggest that some women feel they lack the opportunity to progress and must therefore accept risky leadership positions. As one female manager told us:

A woman has fewer and fewer employment opportunities the higher she climbs the career ladder so she is willing to take a job, even if it is risky. A man, on the other hand, would have a number of job opportunities to choose from. Therefore, he would select the best one.

Other women feel they are disadvantaged because they lack the network of support that men have in the workplace:

I was placed on a project to manage that was the “project from hell” . . . Was I set up for failure? I don't know. But I know it would have been different if I was male. I would have been part of the old schoolboy network that they had going.

There are also repeated accounts of women reporting that they are seen as more “expendable” in the workplace compared to men. In this way they are considered more suitable for risky positions, as described by one woman:

I feel that management think we are more expendable. Some men in management feel that the male workers are more valuable, and cannot be spared to fill a risky position.

However, more positive explanations are also suggested, such as the idea that women have particular skills that make them better able to handle risky leadership positions. In the case of one woman:

I have been assigned projects which are failing with the belief that I can rescue these. The factors for the belief in my ability include that I am a woman and that this gives me some sort of advantage.

Our current research is systematically investigating each of these explanations, and results suggest that the glass cliff phenomenon cannot be fully explained by any one factor. Instead, it seems likely that there are multiple underlying causes, which vary depending on the situation.

How pervasive is the problem?

Our ongoing research suggests that precarious positions are not restricted to FTSE 100 companies, with the glass cliff seeming to be relatively widespread. We have identified glass cliff positions in politics where women are often selected to stand in less winnable seats than men, and in law, where women are assigned less lucrative cases than are men. These findings have also been replicated in experimental studies, where law students are more likely to assign a woman to more risky legal cases than are men, and graduate management students are more likely to choose a woman to lead a failing company than a man. Further, preliminary research also suggests that such positions are not restricted to women, but may also affect members of other marginalized groups, such as those based on ethnicity, disability, or age.

However, it is important to note that while glass cliff positions hold an element of risk, they need not necessarily lead to failure and can indeed be seen as an opportunity. Some women even strategically seek them out:

I am a geologist and I have always had great difficulty getting jobs in mining. I have found that picking and accepting glass cliff situations has helped me to get jobs . . . I have proved that I can and as a consequence I now charge accordingly.

Getting involved

We continue to investigate the processes involved in the appointment of women to glass cliff positions, the experience of being on a glass cliff, and also the consequences of such appointments. We are also eager to investigate how these processes may vary across different sectors and in different situations. A key requirement for our understanding is having people and organizations participate in our research. If you or your organization would like to get involved, or if you would simply like more information about the glass cliff, please contact Dr Michelle Ryan via e-mail (m.ryan@exeter.ac.uk).

Beyond age discrimination to leveraging human capital

ASDA, BT and the UK National Maritime Museum promote age diversity

Western workplaces are becoming more diverse. Governments and organizations are increasingly being proactive about gender equality and ethnic diversity at work. What was once a case of fighting discrimination is now viewed by many as a lasting route to corporate success through the inclusion of all available talent. Economic hotspots, such as California's Silicon Valley are thriving in a multiracial, gender equal atmosphere.

There is another quiet revolution taking place within western workplaces. It is the next great frontier. The arguments against age discrimination are beginning to be won by the realities of the changing nature of the population. Demographics dictate that the workforce in developed nations will get older. Research indicates that this is actually a good thing for employers – there are many benefits to be had from employing older workers, and in the UK retail giant ASDA, telecommunications market-leaders BT and in the public sector the National Maritime Museum are among employers reaping the benefits.

In the UK projections based upon National Office of Statistics figures indicate that by 2013 there will be more people over the age of 65 than there are under the age of 16. This is based upon the declining fertility rates and mortality rates that make an aging population inevitable. As baby-boomers move into retirement, the workforce will fall. Except that retirement ages, look set to rise, further emphasizing the need for employers to focus on their older workers.

Given the increasingly competitive battlefield for staff, it is somewhat surprising to see just how entrenched age discrimination is. In the UK it is estimated as costing the economy £31 billion. Perhaps the most telling projection of all is that by 2020 a quarter of the workforce will be over 50, rising from 20 percent in 1990. Far from being a problem for opinion leaders, it is an opportunity.

ASDA taps into the gray matter

ASDA is the UK's largest employer of the over-50s, employing almost 23,000 in its stores. The food and clothing superstore chain is now part of the Wal-mart group and has long been recognized for its commitment to flexible working and seeks to be the UK's most enjoyable place to work.

Their approach to age equality fits with a firm, overarching approach to equal opportunities in general, captured by the company's equality statement as:

We aim to make sure that no job applicant, existing colleague, customer or supplier is less favorably treated on the grounds of their gender, marital status, sexual orientation, disability, race, religion, color, nationality, ethnic origin or age, and that no one is disadvantaged by conditions, requirements or practices which cannot be shown to be just and fair.

“In the UK public sector retiring early has become something of a cultural norm, and it is against this backdrop that the National Maritime Museum controversially announced that it was abolishing the compulsory retirement age for its workers.”

However, there are business advantages to consider also:

- older workers are being involved in “buddy” processes to help develop younger workers;
- retention of older workers has been shown as improving the morale of colleagues;
- surveys are showing that customers like being helped by older workers; and
- retaining older workers have reduced recruiting and training costs.

In short, ASDA’s favorable policies toward older workers have led to reduced recruitment costs, reduced employee turnover, and reduced sick pay and absenteeism. More than this, they are retaining key knowledge and potential.

BT’s age-positive successes

BT is a global communications player who, in the UK alone serves more than 20 million customers with telephone and related services. Like ASDA, they too have introduced positive policies toward older workers as part of an overall equal opportunities and diversity management approach. Their proportion of workers over the age of 50 has risen from 13 percent to 24 percent in just three years.

As well as being the right thing to do, the business benefits are also substantial:

- slowing the flow of experienced, skilled people out of the organization – that is, retaining talent;
- like ASDA, reducing recruitment and training costs;
- attracting candidates for jobs from the widest possible pool of talent; and
- protecting the pension fund as life expectancy rises.

A flexible retirement strategy is at the heart of the change at BT, with the initiative being billed as “NewStart” and being given the attention that serious culture change requires. There are challenges, and greater emphasis is put on encouraging employees to focus more on career and life planning. The pensions issue focuses the mind, but on the far side the impact of retaining talent is having a very positive effect.

No compulsory retirement at National Maritime Museum

In the UK public sector retiring early has become something of a cultural norm, and it is against this backdrop that the National Maritime Museum controversially announced that it was abolishing the compulsory retirement age for its workers. It was part of a process in which a once white male dominated institution sought better to reflect the diversity of the society it serves and accordingly changed its practices radically in the areas of recruitment, flexible working and the provision of training and development opportunities.

National Maritime Museum is keen to have a diverse workforce, including across the age range, wishing to combine youth with experience in finding the perfect blend. No one should be discriminated against. Older workers are proving to be mentors of the young, and the over 70s segment is growing.

A recent Australian academic study revealed that hidden discriminatory practices still impact on older workers. For example, many standardized skills assessment processes fail

to recognize the different needs of older and younger employees. Yet, as these examples show, the benefits are out there for those organizations willing to grasp them. If ever there was a box to think outside of, or a glass ceiling waiting to be shattered, it has to be the ones that limit the talent that can be drawn on, and limits the ability of people to contribute positively to economic growth and the development of communities.

Comment

This multiple review article is based upon the following papers.

Research and statistical material was drawn from: "Action on age" by Johnson and Geal (2005) which considers the UK context and "Critical issues in managing age and diversity in Australia" by Murray and Syed (2005) whose title speaks for itself.

The case examples were drawn from: "ASDA – valuing the over-50s" by Foster (2004), "BT – positive about age" again by Foster (2005), and "Maritime museum lifts the age barrier" by Wolff (2005).

All papers make compelling reading.

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Developing diverse senior managers

How alike are your high potentials?

If you were asked to describe a stereotypical American CEO, what words would you use? Dynamic? Charismatic? Decisive? Innovative? Inspiring? All of these characteristics would probably spring to mind, but it is even more likely that before you even started coming up with such adjectives that you pictured a middle-aged white male. And whilst you might be right in doing so (just 5 percent of top executive positions are occupied by women in the US), this lack of diversity in the upper echelons of corporate America could potentially have a damaging effect on business in the future.

Lack of opportunity

Despite the increase in diversity of the US workforce over recent decades, the number of female and minority executives has remained disproportionately low. For example:

- 44 percent of executive, administrative and managerial workers are female yet this translates to just 5 percent at a senior level; and
- out of the FT 500 top earners, only 4 percent are female.

It is not surprising, given these statistics, to discover that women are voting with their feet. There are currently over 4.7 million self-employed females in the US and they are starting up their own businesses at four times the growth rate of all employer firms. Add this to the fact that the number of businesses owned by women of color is growing four times faster than any other sector and a very definite pattern of behavior emerges.

So what are the reasons for this perceived lack of opportunity for females and minorities in the workplace? And, more importantly, what steps can employers take in order to turn the tide? Because not only is it fundamentally wrong to deny everyone the same basic opportunities, it is also a widely acknowledged fact that diverse groups produce better, more innovative ideas than groups who look, talk and ultimately think the same.

Common barriers

According to recent research, much of the problem lies at the leadership development stage within an organization. Whilst companies are good at recruiting from a diverse group, they are less competent at ensuring high potential minorities are identified and developed. Reasons for this include:

- few role models, mentors or established networks;
- roles and abilities subject to stereotyping;
- lack of visibility; and
- family commitments.

Encouraging diversity

Here are just a few ways in which these problems can be addressed.

Make acceptance of diversity part of the organizational culture

However, support for this must come right from the very top. The companies that successfully develop diverse talent are those that have direct involvement from the CEO. Whether this is in a formal or informal manner, CEO support demonstrates that diversity is an important part of the company culture and this message will naturally cascade down the organization.

Create a diversity strategy

This will show how a diverse workforce will positively affect the business and could include objectives such as:

- make demographic changes in the workplace (to provide a wider spread of experience);
- identify role models and ensure they have a high visibility in the organization (to encourage more link-ups amongst minority executives);
- make a clear show of the fact that the company is inclusive (making sure no one is marginalized will eventually become an intrinsic part of the company culture);
- ensure employees feel that managers are competent about issues surrounding diversity (this can be achieved through training so that diversity becomes a reality of the business rather than just another management policy); and
- encourage diversity of stakeholders.

To this end, leadership within the organization is absolutely crucial. At the beginning it may be difficult to change the mindsets of leaders but this is certainly possible over time. Again, it is the responsibility of the CEO and senior management to ensure that a diversity strategy is adopted by everyone.

Insist upon manager accountability

This is another critical success factor as it is a widely quoted fact that a bad manager is consistently the number one reason people give for their decision to quit a job. Managers need to understand their importance in this respect and ensure that all employees:

- have a positive induction including an introduction to colleagues and company practices (formal and informal);
- have their ambitions recognized and respected;
- are included within informal networks; and
- have constant support in all situations.

Equality training

Whilst this can be a helpful tool, great care should be taken when selecting a method of training. All-women courses have not proved beneficial to many companies as they reinforce gender differences and can further segregate attendees from their male peers.

It should also be clearly stated in these training courses that diversity awareness is not the same as positive discrimination and that increased diversity does not necessarily drive productivity. However, value is created in the enhanced networks and cooperation within the workforce.

Other interventions focus upon:

- mentoring;
- talent identification and development; and
- work-life balance.

“ Not only is it fundamentally wrong to deny everyone the same basic opportunities, it is also a widely acknowledged fact that diverse groups produce better, more innovative ideas than groups who look, talk and ultimately think the same. ”

Where to next?

In a workshop last year, one of London Business School's leading researchers, Lynda Gratton told participants of her experiences at a US hotel where a major investment bank and a blue chip retail organization were both holding their annual senior executive meetings. She was amazed at how all the executives from the bank looked the same (tall, athletic build with a full head of hair) just as all the employees from the retail organization were shorter, balding and fairly rotund. Gratton remarked that so distinct was their appearance that she could literally divide them into the two camps as they emerged one-by-one from the dining area.

So when you are at your next company board meeting or senior executive gathering, take a look around. If you observe a sea of similar faces then it may be time to think about putting a diversity strategy in place. Because although, as the saying goes, great minds think alike, great ideas usually come from the meeting of minds that are anything but the same.

Comment

This is a review of “Building diversity in the pipeline to corporate leadership” by Kilian *et al.* (2005). This concise, well-written article explores the reasons why diversity is still an issue in the US and gives some useful pointers for anyone who wants to make sure they develop a diverse senior workforce. Its straightforward language and fascinating statistics make the paper a must-read for anyone interested in this field of management.

Reference

Kilian, C.M., Hukai, D. and McCarty, C. (2005), “Building diversity in the pipeline to corporate leadership”, *Journal of Management Development*, Vol. 24 No. 2, pp. 155-68.

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Geert Hofstede: challenges of cultural diversity

Interview by Sarah Powell



Geert Hofstede

Geert Hofstede is the most cited non-American in the field of management in the US Social Science Citation Index.

Although his seminal theories on national cultures were only elaborated and published in the late 1970s/early 1980s, Hofstede's inspiration arose from his work in the preceding decade in IBM Europe where he was one of the driving forces behind the creation of IBM's International Employee Opinion Research Program. Over a six-year period, he and his colleagues collected and analyzed more than 100,000 survey questionnaires completed by matched groups of IBM employees in 72 countries around the world.

Hofstede left IBM to become a professor at various international management schools including IMD, Lausanne, INSEAD Fontainebleau, and the European Institute for Advanced Studies in Management, Brussels. It was at this time that he completed his analysis of the IBM employee survey database, leading to his definition of four dimensions of national culture and publication of his influential book *Culture's Consequences*. In 1980 he co-founded the Institute for Research on Intercultural Cooperation (IRIC) and in 1985 he accepted a full professorship at Maastricht University where he taught Organizational Anthropology and International Management until 1993. Geert Hofstede has acted as a consultant to national and international business and government organizations including the World Bank, OECD, Asian Productivity Organization and the Commission of the European Union.

How did your ideas on the implications of national culture in the workplace evolve?

This was initially through my work as a psychologist at IBM Europe where I founded and managed the Personnel Research Department. I dealt with people from many different IBM subsidiaries and I was struck by the differences in their behavior.

Our department was not involved in investigating culture at the time – we didn't even use the word – but we did collect various data which led us to observe the different behavior and note the different opinions of people from differing cultural backgrounds. Our department also initiated survey research in the various subsidiaries of IBM and, through this, my colleagues and I came to realize that these behavioral differences could only be accounted for by nationality.

It was only after I had left IBM on a sabbatical and was teaching at IMD in Lausanne in Switzerland that I had the time to consider this finding in depth. Questioning people outside IBM, from different countries, I perceived these same cultural differences. This led to my definition of the four dimensions of national culture – power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism/collectivism, and masculinity/femininity – as analyzed in my book *Culture's Consequences* in 1980.

To what extent do you believe language capability exerts a role in cultural determination and adaptation?

I would say that understanding of other languages is almost a necessary, albeit insufficient, condition for the understanding of the phenomenon of culture. One of my criticisms of, especially, American researchers in the field is that, with no knowledge of any foreign language, some believe they can issue statements about foreign cultures; I would doubt the validity of their conclusions.

Despite the existence of many multinational organizations in 1980 when you published your book, it was some time before the importance of *Culture's Consequences* was widely recognized. Why was this?

When I started my work in the 1970s, very few people were interested. But at the time of publication, in 1980, interest in the implications of cultural diversity was just taking off. My subject was new and any new subject takes time to catch on.

The early 1980s saw publication of Peters and Waterman's *In Search of Excellence*, and various other books about the "Japanese miracle". It was becoming clear that the Japanese were out-performing the Americans and that differences in culture provided an explanation. Hence culture was "legitimized" by economic circumstances. People wanted to understand the phenomenon. There were a number of rather superficial books available at the time but mine was the only one that was based on solid research.

Given the spread of multinationals, international management programs, student years abroad and so on, do you see any lessening in the influence of cultural determinants on the behavior of younger managers?

I only detect this within the specific dimension of individualism/collectivism. Clearly people from countries that become more affluent move more in the direction of individualism. In Japan, for example, the young tend to be more individualistic than their parents. However, this is not the case across the other three dimensions, i.e. power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity/femininity. Here cultural determinants have proved extremely tenacious and this generation still strongly mirrors those of their parents, i.e. the younger generation still holds the values that they were brought up with, even in cases where through prolonged international exposure they have managed to acquire the skills to deal with people from quite different backgrounds.

Have not changes in society over recent decades, the increase in many countries of women reaching executive positions, and the emphasis on "soft skills" lessened the impact of the masculinity/femininity dimension?

In general, the dimension is not about being female or male, but about behaving in a masculine or feminine way. Women in executive positions are smart and have learned to adapt and behave in a masculine way to compete in a man's world. Such women are less likely to demonstrate "soft" skills, especially in masculine national cultures. In feminine national cultures, such as in the Nordic countries or The Netherlands, soft skills are not the prerogative of women, but are also practiced by men.

Do you perceive any erosion of the impact of cultural differences resulting from the spread of the internet, immediacy of communications and worldwide growth of American English as the language of business?

A recent study of consumer behavior and the role of the internet concluded that the internet does not change people's way of thinking as such because people with different cultural backgrounds use the internet differently. In general, people use the tools at their disposal to do the same things as they did before the tools were there. So, hierarchical cultures will use the internet in a hierarchical way, using it to communicate downwards. Feminine cultures, meanwhile, will use the internet more for chatting. I think it is too optimistic to expect that any tool – and the internet is only a tool – would have an impact on the way a person thinks.

In addition, communication is defined by the receiver, not by the sender. When we receive a message, we don't necessarily receive it in the same way the sender intended it to be received.

Surely there must be some impact from mass media and marketing and the news, advertising and products which are increasingly globally available?

Here I would distinguish between values and practices. Values are the deeper levels, the deeper meanings behind our conceptions of good and evil. Our practices are reflected in the way we speak or dress, what we buy, and so on. Yes, we could be influenced in these areas. However, while we can adopt certain behavior patterns, research indicates that this does not seem to affect our underlying values.

You have been a consultant to a number of national and international businesses and government organizations including the Commission of the European Communities in Brussels. To what degree do you see the EU's work and vision of the future as being complicated by the diversity of cultures in Europe and consequent differing values and work approaches of Commission staff members?

I consider that it is enormously complicated by this, particularly because quite a few of the old Eurocrats resist the very idea that people are affected by their cultural background; they see this as a threat.

In the 1970s I was living in Brussels when I started developing my ideas of culture and I approached the commission about this – but found myself initially directed to an official who was responsible for museums! Such was their idea of culture! Today culture remains something of a taboo although it is becoming less so with the enlargement of the community.

But of course, while cultural diversity complicates things, it also renders it interesting as well – making the European Union a very interesting partner for other parts of the world to work with because of this in-built cultural variety. However cultural diversity also complicates decision-making. This is a fact of life and the European Union will survive to the extent it is able to cope with the challenge. To that extent I believe it is a wonderful "laboratory" for the rest of the world: a group of countries that are more or less at an equal level of development, but with very different histories and a great variety of concepts of good and evil. If these countries succeed in resolving their differences peacefully and in moving together towards the solution of common problems, this will set a groundbreaking precedent. So, in total, the cultural differences between member states can be seen as both good and bad – the reality is somewhere in between.

At its root, culture is not an intellectual thing – it operates on an emotional not on an intellectual level. As such, I don't believe that educational level impacts on sensitivities. There is, however, a personality factor. Some people are undoubtedly more open minded to new ideas and feel less threatened by ideas that are different from theirs. They are the people who operate most successfully in an international environment. That said, their jobs bring both frustration and satisfaction – frustration when they don't succeed, and considerable satisfaction when they do manage to conclude good business with people who come from a very different background – which of course happens too.

Having determined the problem or the challenge, how do you advocate that understanding of cultural impact be used?

My approach is to make it "discussable", beyond simple parroting of stereotypes. We are talking of people who for absolutely legitimate reasons have different opinions on what is good or what is evil. Through making such differences discussable, we can identify areas of international co-operation where it is possible to respect the feelings and the convictions of the various parties. The cultural dimensions I describe are very much a way of making culture discussable. They are completely neutral and there is no disadvantage in being on one side or the other of any one of the dimensions, e.g. being collectivist is no better or worse than being an individualist. For perfectly good historical reasons, some cultures veer

“At its root, culture is not an intellectual thing – it operates on an emotional not on an intellectual level. As such, I don’t believe that educational level impacts on sensitivities.”

towards one type and others towards the other. Once we determine cultural predispositions, we try to use the information to promote recognition and acceptance of these differences between the various cultures.

This month sees publication of an entirely rewritten second edition of your book *Culture’s Consequences*. How does this differ from the original and are there any significant new conclusions?

I have rewritten the book entirely to incorporate all the uses of the original ideas that have been made over the past 20 years. These have been very substantial and my research for this new edition involved ploughing through some 3,000 items of literature. Some 50 per cent of these are referred to in the book. I have also reworked all the calculations in the original.

This new edition is 600 pages long and is primarily oriented towards academic usage. It explores a range of values and practices; new applications and conclusions cover areas such as consumer behavior, political behavior and linguistics as a reflection of culture. I investigate how culture determines all areas of life including perceptions of health, family and even sexual behavior. I have also explored the relationship between superiors and subordinates, and the correlation between power distance and corruption.

Do you have any other books under preparation?

I am currently collaborating with our eldest son, Gert-Jan Hofstede and an American colleague, Paul Pedersen who are preparing a book on training methods and simulations which can be used to train groups to deal with other cultures. Our book will be entitled *The Ten Synthetic Cultures*. This project is a good example of how we can put information on the impact of national cultures to practical use.

Keywords:
Equal opportunities,
National cultures

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Barclays bank on Africa

Expanding business into the third world

William Gibbon, HR Director of Barclays Africa and Middle East, has had a job on his hands recently. In 2002, the bank won a bid to create the biggest foreign direct investment with the acquisition of the majority stake in Absa Bank. It was a huge vote of confidence for Africa, as the group launched a £3 billion bid. The headline read “the 20 billion Rand eagle has just landed”. It was a huge challenge, as there was a perception of Barclays as a western giant, and cultural issues to overcome. Within the wider community of governments and regulators in the 12 countries across Africa, Barclays were questioned, were they a colonial bank? Were they a remnant of the British Empire and were they really relevant for the African renaissance? So just like the continent itself, Barclays had to deal with social, political, and economic challenges.

Before they started, Gibbon observed that 15 percent of the groups workforce was sitting in Africa. That accounted for 12,000 people, who probably supported a further 45 to 50,000 people in extended family. Barclays were struggling to attract talent and investment; it relied on old loyalties, an old market, and old methods of doing business. It was a bank that placed much more emphasis on compliance than creativity. So the top team sat down and devised a plan of action to successfully bring Barclays into Africa:

- To make significant changes to the senior leaders.
- To form a single, pan-African leadership team, rather than the country chiefdoms that had gone before.
- To move out of the Head Office in London, and be where their customers were 6,000 miles away in Johannesburg.
- To find new income streams, new markets, new countries, and new customer segments.
- A stepped change in performance was needed, not only by individuals, but by the organization as a whole.
- To look at the organizational design, to move away from individual models, to a centralized functional matrix.
- To reposition the organization as a modern employer brand with modern union relationships, and a cutting edge approach to the HIV/AIDS crisis.
- To brand and brighten the branches across the continent, creating a sense of pride for customers, and a sense of pride for their employees. They introduced uniforms for the first time, and in Ghana, a lot of the staff wear them to go to church on a Sunday.
- To create a framework of rigor, of a high performing organization.

Success through inclusion

There were a lot of changes to the people, including the majority of the executive team (80 percent of the leaders were changed). There are 100 roles around Africa in leading countries, originally 50 percent of those were UK ex-pats, and now only 5 percent of those are UK ex-pats. The others are great African leaders. The workforce was restructured from 12,000 people to 7,000 people, over the last three years. A pan-African trade union organization has been created across all 12 countries, and facilitated that reduction in workforce without one day of strike action. They have redesigned management systems, introduced a cutting edge HIV/AIDS approach, and, more importantly, HR has played a key role in creating space for people to grow, and space for leaders to lead. It is important to remember that none of this would have been possible without recognizing that the trade union voice across Africa are Barclays' peace-seeking allies and partners. Barclays claim to be the only organization at this stage across Africa that has got that kind of partnership arrangement with 12 different unions. Opinion surveys are employed every year and in three years have gone from a level just under 50 percent participation from employees to nearly 80 percent in 2005.

HR stands for courage

Leadership can be lonely, and consequently leaders need courageous HR people. Gibbon had to make some really tough decisions, including closing the London office and not taking those people with him, he wanted to regroup people in South Africa. He completely disempowered Barclays' country management teams until they could be changed, and now they are busy re-empowering them again. In Zimbabwe, when inflation reached 650 percent last year, Barclays had to halve the size of the network; and lost 500 people. Gibbon's team worked very hard to sell those branches to indigenous banks in Zimbabwe, and 90 percent of those 500 people affected stayed in the same chair at the same teledesk from the Friday to the Monday, working for a new organization on the Monday. The people of Barclays Africa are voting without a shadow of a doubt that they are one the best organizations to work for in Africa. With a newly implemented equality and diversity drive, a third of the talent pool are female, and no longer are 90 percent of the country managing directors British ex-pats. There are now two female African women leading two of Barclays' banks in Africa. Gibbon believes diversity is not just about race, gender, sexual orientation and age, it is about diversity of thought.

Work in the community

Gibbon believes that Barclays owed it to the countries they were working with to contribute to the community. Of course this is not totally selfless, it is in Barclays' interests to keep staff healthy and happy. And it is not bad PR either.

Communities look to large multi-national companies to help actually create the infrastructure of the country. And so the issue about this is; is it about philanthropy, or is it about solid commercial reasons? Our HIV program for employees and their dependants, is it morally the right thing to do, or is it really because it reduces absenteeism, which therefore reduces drain in pension costs, and reduces recruitment and re-training? Of course it is, so commercially it's the right thing to do. We do extend lives by about 10 years as a result. So for me, it's a good example of being the right thing to do, but also being the right thing for the business. If we can create and sustain a customer base that's growing with wealth, they'll need to bank, and in the African countries, you've got a huge proportion of the populous who are not banked. If we can create sustainable development whereby they come into the bracket of earning money and need to therefore have money transmission, then you're creating your customer base for the future (Gibbon, 2005).

“ The people of Barclays Africa are voting without a shadow of a doubt that they're one the best organizations to work for in Africa. ”

£1.5 million a year is contributed to community projects, and seven out of ten employees give their own time into community projects. It is important to remember that most of the banks in the African context have been there for the best part of 100 years, so they were part of the money transmission machine of the British empire. Most of those banks survived, in one way or another, the road to independence in those countries in the 1950s and 1960s, and even in Zimbabwe in 1980, and the local governments recognize this as an achievement and often approach the Barclays risk team to help write policies for government in those countries in which they operate. Barclay's maternity policies have even won the best maternity policies award, and in 2004 William Gibbon won the HR Director of the Year Award in the Personnel Today Awards.

Gibbon feels his priority in HR is really about the value HR adds, rather than the activities or the processes that they are paid to manage. To make the vision of Barclays in Africa a reality, Gibbon and his colleagues all made the 6,000 miles transfer to Johannesburg to actually live that dream. They had to change many leaders, introduce lots of new communication methodology and restyle HR processes and systems to support the business strategy. But what really made the difference was the hope and pride created in the people. Many organizations can change through the introduction of IT systems, processes, marketing and promotions, but Barclays did it through creating hope and pride in their people, who in turn, created hope, trust and pride in their customers.

Now Barclays have joined hands with Absa in South Africa, they are represented in 15 countries across the continent, employing 40,000 people. There is a 58 percent increase in customers who are likely to recommend Barclays as the place to bank in the chosen market and Africa is bringing in 15 percent of the groups profit.

Direct impact on staff: what does this all mean to Alice?

Alice has stayed with the bank during the transition. She is now sitting in a modernized branch, with a clear understanding of her role. She uses Barclays University, a virtual university on the intranet that has now been developed and delivered into every branch across Africa. Her manager discusses her performance with her on a quarterly basis, and even now decides her pay and bonus, without relying on a union matrix. She is thrilled to be working in her new uniform and feels very proud, because in the last employee opinion survey, she was amongst the 75 percent of people who said Barclays is the only place to work in Kenya. Her family are now even getting involved; in September 2005 they were involved in a sponsored walk created by the branches, to raise money for an AIDS orphanage in the Kuru.

Keywords:
Banks,
Africa

Note

Kim Foster, Managing Editor of *Human Resource Management International Digest*, wrote this article.

Reference

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The glass ceiling: smashed or still holding strong?

Why are women still rarely in the top jobs?

In the US women make up 46.5 percent of the workforce and only 8 percent of top managers. They earn on average 72 percent of their male colleagues' salaries. In Europe, none of the 25 highest earning CEOs are female. In France, one economist claims that only 5 percent of executives are women, and in the UK no woman has ever headed a large company. This is over 20 years on from the first use of the term "glass ceiling", which referred to the obstacles women face on the corporate ladder, and in theory a few decades on from a widespread commitment to bring equality into the workplace. What is going on?

Recently, there have been several high profile law suits in the media in which women have successfully sued their employers for unfair discrimination based on their gender. As a result, the most popular slant with journalists on the topic is that the stuffy and traditional men at the top of large businesses are still failing to recognize women as equals: they pay them less and promote them less often. In some scenarios this is no doubt still the case, especially in traditionally male arenas such as finance and IT. Yet this understanding of the situation is partial, and fails to recognize the different and more complicated elements of the problem.

When IBM, GE and BP chose to joint sponsor a recent conference on "Women in leadership" they were making a statement that reflects the current sentiment of many other companies. It is not only for ethical reasons that HR directors and CEOs are now actively pursuing having women in their top positions: they realize that there is a real business case for having them there as a reflection of the diverse market they are trying to sell to. Consequently, IBM and Deloitte see having women at the top as their point of difference in the marketplace and Cigna and Westpac have committed serious money to recruiting and developing executive women.

Cigna and Westpac: committed to women

Cigna, for example, have poured \$2 million annually into grooming and retaining female leaders. They have emerging leader development programs, which immerse chosen employees in seminars and management training over three years. Participants are also assigned a mentor to discuss their plans and development. Since 1998 turnover among female managers at Cigna has dropped 50 percent and 24 percent of the company's executive and senior women now fill management level posts. Even better, 44 percent of promotions into senior management now go to women, as against 12 percent in 1999. CEO Edward Hanway explains these changes simply:

[It's] the best way to operate strategically and to gain a competitive edge in a tough marketplace.

Westpac is a financial Australian company that has for some time been working along a similar idea. CEO David Morgan says:

“ Many ambitious and proactive females feel older men find them in some ways intimidating. ”

I see becoming back of choice for women as a long-term strategy, integral to our core business and not just an add on. This is a customer imperative and an important and valuable business strategy.

This strategy has given birth to training and development programs, merit-based selection processes, succession planning that focuses on women with potential, paid maternity leave and other such initiatives designed with equality in mind. Testament to these efforts are a series of awards – Silver Award of the Corporate Work and Family Award in 1997 and Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Award in 2002 are among them.

Social issues still at play

Yet despite these efforts, reflective of those of many firms across the globe, statistics still show that progress is slow. The explanations offered still point to ongoing social stereotypes and dilemmas that, frustratingly for HR directors, are very difficult to eradicate.

For a start, men's preference to promote and work alongside other men still prevails in some situations. Though this thinking is diminishing, it does still exist – many ambitious and proactive females feel older men find them in some ways intimidating. This is perhaps the result of another difficulty concerning stereotypes of high-powered women. Female members of staff at Westpac felt they were wrongly seen as “dominatrix, wicked witch, power maniac” or in the striking image of “a Rottweiler with lipstick”. Not only does this mean such females are not well liked, it also goes to show that many of them appear to think that success is still a result of masculine behavior. Surely this goes against the reasoning behind recruiting more women into high positions in the first place – namely that they add a different, softer, skill set and bring diversity to the team. Not knowing how best to present themselves leaves many women feeling uncomfortable at work, and so they opt out of a steep progression.

The most difficult dilemma to overcome, though, is one that is hard to see a way round. Through simple biology, women are still the heart of the family scene. Careers are often curtailed because maternity leave takes women out of the workplace for years at a time and realistically it is hard to hold positions open as companies move on. It is no coincidence that many of the most powerful women in business are childless – Cigna's most powerful three women have made this choice. Another executive, their vice president for national accounts, does have two young children but believes this is only possible because her husband does not work:

I do not understand how anyone at my level can have this type of career and not have a spouse who stays at home.

Both Cigna and Westpac have tried to address this difficulty by introducing flexible working hours, the option to work from home sometimes, on-site day care, take home dinners and mentoring. Yet such efforts to address the life/work balance have unearthed other workplace stigmas that still exist. Those who take advantage of flexible working hours report that all too often they are met with an attitude that suggests they are not pulling their weight or are somehow skiving. It is important, then, that firms back new initiatives with efforts to change corporate culture – if a new attitude is not communicated and accepted then money and energy go down the drain.

Finally, analysts believe that more and more women of high potential are simply choosing not to play the corporate game any more. Rather than risk the frustrations of the glass ceiling, a working culture that objects to powerful women and/or their aspirations for family and the sense of having to constantly battle to get anywhere, women are now going it alone. There

has been a big rise in the number of females who are pursuing their entrepreneurial dreams, attracted by the freedom and no longer feeling that they must have the security of a large organization behind them. And why not? Until such organizations find a way of offering comparable freedom and flexibility, and make female staff genuinely feel they are valued and equal, then they will continue to frustrate and lose valuable assets that are core to the future of their business. HR directors: over to you.

Comment

This is a review of "EEO in senior management: women executives in Westpac" by Beck and Davis (2005), "When women rise – women in senior management" by Tahmincioglu (2004) and "The conundrum of the glass ceiling", a Special Report on Women in Business from *The Economist* (2005).

Beck and Davis have written a study on the management of gender diversity in Australian firm Westpac, a company that has committed to increasing the number of women employed at management levels. The report outlines the approach Westpac has taken in achieving these goals, and draws on interviews with ten women in senior management to assess the reality of the current situation. They conclude that while some old obstacles have been overcome, there are still elements of the glass ceiling in place.

"When women rise" details the program set up by US firm Cigna Dental Care and Vision to develop the leadership skills of female employees. The aim is to see more women applying confidently for top-level positions so that senior management can boast the right mix of skills for success. Tahmincioglu considers the difficulties that women come across in their fight for the top jobs and finds that many of these still revolve around motherhood. As a possible solution she highlights the importance of flexibility in the workplace.

"The conundrum of the glass ceiling" argues that despite the efforts of many organizations, the glass ceiling that prevents women rising in the workplace is still firmly in place. The article looks at various countries, finding there are still few females in the top roles, and those that are there have taken a lower salary than their male counterparts. It posits arguments in favor of women in senior positions as a good business strategy, yet points out both the difficulties women still face in terms of balancing the work/home ratio and in terms of enduring stereotypes.

Keywords:
Human resource
management,
Management strategy,
Women,
Business ethics

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Amin Rajan: promotion of workforce diversity

Interview by Sarah Powell



Amin Rajan

In this interview Professor Amin Rajan speaks to Sarah Powell about the business benefits of and practical challenges involved in the promotion of workforce diversity.

Amin Rajan is the Chief Executive of the Centre for Research in Employment and Technology in Europe (CREATE) – a pan-European network of prominent researchers undertaking high-level advisory assignments for the UK government, city institutions, multinational companies and international bodies such as the EU, OECD and ILO. He is a visiting professor at the Cass Business School, London Guildhall University and at the Centre for Leadership Studies at Exeter University, and also President of the Scientific Committee at Audencia-Nantes, Ecole de Management. In 1998 he was awarded the Aspen Institute's Prize in leadership.

Professor Rajan has acted as a senior consultant to companies including ABN-AMRO, British Telecom, Ford, GSK, HSBC, IBM, ICI, ICL, Lloyds TSB, Merrill Lynch Investment Management, Microsoft, Morgan Stanley, Motorola, Rolls Royce, Shell and UBS. He is the author of numerous books and articles and, most recently, a major report co-authored with Barbara Martin and Jenny Latham and entitled "Harnessing workforce diversity to raise the bottom line".

Your report "Harnessing workforce diversity to raise the bottom line" emphasizes the impact of globalization and corporate restructuring in promoting market, business and workforce diversity. How widespread is recognition of the business argument for workforce diversity?

Amin Rajan: two main factors have led to growing recognition of and interest in diversity. First, globalization is bringing different categories of customers to the market place, prompting organizations to question whether they have the appropriate workforce to meet the needs of such customers. The second main factor is corporate restructuring which has led companies to focus on the creation of more vibrant cultures. In the past companies have had very little success in this area and many have recognized that this was very much the result of what one could describe as a predominantly "male, stale and pale" workforce.

While the moral dimension of diversity and inclusion is important, it is very much in the background. Diversity initiatives are market-driven, promoted by the need to have an innovative workforce. In addition, large global companies such as Procter & Gamble or Shell understand the need for a "licence to operate" in different countries, which requires good equality policies. In companies such as these diversity is often equated with equality.

How can the business impact of diversity and inclusion be quantified?

It is possible to quantify the business impact in specific situations. For example, in the case of retail banks we surveyed, specific recruitment initiatives have been introduced to attract minority groups to bank branches. The banks were then able to compare the volume of

business conducted prior to these initiatives with that after, revealing an increase of some 30 percent.

In addition to such “before and after” comparisons, which are particularly applicable to the retail sector, other organizations have sought qualitative indicators, conducting customer perception and/or staff perception surveys to explore whether a diverse workforce contributes to productivity, morale, customer service and so on. In addition to such quantitative and qualitative assessments, it has to be said that in a majority of organizations it is very much taken as an article of faith that such initiatives bring benefits.

Does size of company affect the challenge of embracing workplace diversity?

Paradoxically, there are far fewer challenges in smaller companies than in larger organizations and it is a fact that small- and medium-sized enterprises employ proportionately more members of ethnic minority groups, for example, than do large companies. The cultures of these smaller companies are very inclusive, people work more closely together and there is no need for overt policies or formal procedures.

Meanwhile there are substantial challenges for large organizations. The first is management style, which can have a very negative impact if inappropriate. For example, many managers have no idea how to deal with senior women, tending to treat them like secretaries. Second, managers are often very autocratic which can crush innovation. Third, few managers really do “walk the talk”; because of time pressures, they fail to listen to the workforce. So in large companies the major challenge is not so much that of attracting women or minority groups or disabled people; it is getting the best out of them. The problem is not so much one of diversity as one of inclusion, and this can be exacerbated by the existence of frequently exclusive sub-cultures within the organization.

You have stressed your belief in a meritocracy, i.e. that a job should go to the best qualified candidate, irrespective of personal identity. How can an organization promoting the merits of a diverse workforce create a “pipeline” of strong candidates to fulfill both imperatives?

There are two ways of doing this. One is to “plug into” local community groups or local networks of minority groups, disabled people or women to emphasize job opportunities and encourage applications. Electronic Data Systems (EDS) is one company that is already doing this with notable success. The second way to encourage a diverse pool of applicants is through attention to the recruitment process. This is already happening. Barclays, for example, recruits a substantial number of women candidates to junior management roles. Legal & General is promoting a similar trend. Both examples are evidence of pipelines that have been deliberately created. The process of encouraging diversity is at an early stage but a seedbed of potential leaders has been planted.

Global companies are also introducing diversity through recruitment from other countries. Not many organizations can do this because it is an expensive option and recruitment is mostly at a top management level. While at middle management level it is less frequent, some companies such as Fujitsu do pursue this route. In the UK, for example, Fujitsu takes on some 100 graduates each year, 40 of whom come from the continent, which is quite a high figure. IBM and Microsoft have similar programs to tap into overseas sources of talent. But there is a substantial cost involved in such initiatives and it is preferable to create our own pipeline here rather than disturb that elsewhere.

You have observed that a culture of inclusion was especially notable in two types of organizations: professional services firms and large companies. Can you elaborate on the reasons for this distinction?

Professional services firms tend to have a culture of inclusion and regard women and minority groups as income earners. They want to ensure that their income earners really perform to their best level of ability. Large companies, such as Prudential Insurance and Legal & General, meanwhile, often have very progressive human resource policies and practices, with the result that diversity takes place automatically as a result of this overt action.

What is your view of the use of quotas to promote diversity?

Some organizations have introduced quotas because they think that is the best thing to do, but they are in a minority. Only 4 percent of the companies that I surveyed had introduced quotas. My personal view is that the government should not get involved in quota-setting. Both at UK and EU level there is legislation on equality and diversity. But this legislation is cast in such cumbersome language that it is almost impossible to operationalize it in the workplace.

I would prefer companies to become aware of the business case for diversity and to implement a diversity and inclusion agenda on this basis rather than in response to any legislative pressures. Legislation just does not work very effectively in this area. We do of course need minimum legislation in the area of equality and we already have this, while the activities of the Commission for Equal Opportunities and the Commission for Racial Equality in the UK are very valuable. As a result we now have sufficient structure and legislative mechanisms in this area and the key should be to encourage progress on the business benefits aspect.

Is the business benefit argument for diversity a new one?

It is a new way of looking at the benefits of diversity, and the diversity initiatives we have written about have all come about in the past three years. As said, market-driven diversity initiatives are linked to globalization and social changes in our society. Seven out of ten newcomers to the UK labor market today are either members of minority groups and/or women. These groups also constitute very important elements of businesses' customer bases. This development has only really been recognized over the past five years.

You have written that workforce diversity has “ensured a widespread talent famine”? I had imagined the promotion of diversity would widen the available talent pool

Our two interpretations reflect the difference between a demand-led and a supply-led market. The talent famine interpretation derives from the impact of demand for good female or minority group candidates which has actually already caused a talent famine. Many of the problems of recruitment of women, for example, to senior positions in the UK are related to increasing demands for excellent women managers. So this is not a supply-led issue.

Your interpretation considers the issue from the supply side. While a contraction in population of certain age groups might suggest that encouraging diversity could help bridge the gap, this has proved insufficient because alongside that contraction there has been a huge surge in demand. Competition in products and services has accelerated the need for talented people as never before. The situation is exacerbated by a fundamental feature of the labor market in the UK, as noted by employers, which is that the difference between the average and the best employee has widened considerably. Excellent candidates are very few and far between.

How can corporate leaders instill a culture of diversity?

First, they need to have a diversity agenda. Second, they need to create instruments such as diversity councils to monitor and implement the agenda. Third, they need to ensure that all managers have an inclusive management style – and this is crucial: the first two initiatives will be ineffective without this because it will not be possible to get the best out of people. The fourth and final imperative is to ensure that diversity features on the performance matrix of all managers so that they are measured on what they do or don't do.

In your recent lecture at the Royal Society of Arts you reiterated the importance of line managers in the successful promotion of diversity policies. What sort of training prepares them for this role?

The content of training is crucial. Instilling a willingness and ability to listen are important components. Another part of training is to discourage stereotyping, helping managers to understand that this is dysfunctional behavior that can result in missed opportunities. A third

element is to drive home the message that in real life each individual is different. Managers should see the world not in their own image but as it is.

The formal, tailored programs CREATE devises with its clients are designed to get across these fundamental ideas, and companies which have pioneered such training include Shell, Barclays, Lloyds TSB and IBM.

You have noted that the “life experiences of women, ethnic minority groups and the disabled – acquired through discrimination or challenging circumstances – are believed to equip them better to cope with change . . .” Surely there are also cases in which negative experiences have eroded self-confidence or inspired cynicism, making some potentially talented individuals less likely to follow up good jobs? How would you reach out to these people?

The normal distribution curve applies to everything in life and, yes, people whose adverse life experiences have left a negative effect are certainly at a disadvantage in the job market. But it is also true that some people are remarkably resilient, learn positive lessons from negative experiences and emerge better able cope with adversity in later life. Such people are likely to make valuable contributions to an organization.

On the question of who should help those who have not fared so well, I am not sure that it is the responsibility of employers, but feel that it is more that of the community through government initiatives. This said, many companies already do help through government-inspired initiatives for disadvantaged people such as New Deal.

What notable examples of successful diversity initiatives could you cite?

Well, I would certainly cite Shell, Barclays, IBM, Allen & Overy and Sainsbury's, whose initiatives have been successful in the sense of their showing early positive results, although it is too early to gauge their cultural impact. These are new initiatives that have been running for some three years, whose impact will be felt over the longer period.

What do you see as the major challenges of the future for business in terms of harnessing workplace diversity to foster creativity and innovation?

The main challenge really boils down to “staying power”. While diversity initiatives are important and have the backing of many top business leaders, there is always the risk that, with a change of leadership or market environment, interest or determination will wane. But, if momentum can be maintained, we could see some very exciting results.

The second challenge is the extent to which organizations are able to make a business case to line managers, and the third challenge is that of creation of a national pipeline. As a business you can introduce as many initiatives as you like, but if there is no pool of people to take up the jobs on offer, such exercises are pointless.

Keywords:
Employees,
Equal opportunities

Note

“Harnessing workforce diversity to raise the bottom line” by Professor Amin Rajan, Barbara Martin and Jenny Latham is the first study of its kind to assess the business benefits of diversity. The study was conducted by CREATE with funding from the London Central Learning and Skills Council, the London Human Resource Group, Deutsche Bank and Allen & Overy. CREATE can be contacted on +44 (0) 1892 526757 or visit www.create-research.co.uk

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Survival of the fittest

Discrimination against obesity in the American workplace

Consider this scenario: you are a manager looking for a new sales consultant who will take on responsibility for a considerable percentage of your turnover by forming relationships with new clients and developing new business. You have had two external applications and one internal one. The external candidates appear to have had relevant sales experience but in a different product area. The internal one has worked with you for eight years and has a thorough knowledge of your organization, its people, its products and its objectives. They have consistently performed to a very high standard, have worked with the other sales consultants and are well liked. They feel it is time for a new challenge though, and have come to you for this position. The internal candidate is the only one of the three who is obese.

The ethical impulse in all of us might immediately say that obesity should in no way be an influential factor in deciding whether or not someone matches a job specification and that in this scenario the internal candidate appears in a perfect position to get this promotion. Just as it is widely accepted as morally wrong to discriminate against employees on the basis of their age, gender or race, we might say, it is similarly unacceptable to judge someone negatively on the basis of his or her looks. Political correctness has trained us to respond in this way. However, despite our surface responses, the reality is actually often quite different.

How are organizations responding to obesity?

Through manipulating perceptions of hypothetical job applicants through verbal and photographic images that increased weight, various studies have investigated what the effect of being overweight in an employment environment is. On the whole they have repeatedly found that obese people are consistently discriminated against, with women suffering even greater prejudice than men. Overweight people attract stigmas about their characters and approach to work: included in these are that they must be lacking in self-discipline, less neat, less productive, less ambitious, less determined, have poor personal hygiene and are unprofessional. They are therefore less likely to be interviewed and get a job if people of normal weight have also applied.

Comparisons of salaries have shown that in the US obese people earn on average between 6 and 12 percent less than people of average weight with the same skill sets. Similarly, overweight people receive fewer recommendations for promotion and many are denied standard benefits such as health insurance because of the additional cost involved. It is unquestionable, then, that discrimination against obesity is a real, current and widespread problem in the US and no doubt many other countries. In this situation, the question is perhaps something more like can organizations continue to get away with it?

What the law says

In most of the US, unlike age, gender and race, weight is not a protected factor in fair-employment law. This means that legally, an employer can dismiss an obese employee on those grounds alone, and similarly they may be denied interview. Should a rejected candidate object, however, the employer must be able to demonstrate that weight is a genuine qualification for the job in question. Unsurprisingly this is a potentially gray area, and an obese person will have more chance in successfully raising an objection on legal grounds if they can link the discrimination in with another protected characteristic.

For instance, race and gender are both protected by US employment law, and on average there is greater incidence of obesity in African Americans than whites and in women than men. Therefore, an employer who discriminates against an obese African American female on the grounds of obesity puts them self in a potentially tricky legal situation.

Another means by which obese people may be able to protect themselves legally is if they can link their weight to an actual disability. The Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990 means that it is illegal to discriminate against someone who has a physical or mental disability that “substantially limits one or more . . . major life activities” of the individual. It is rare that this Act will protect the obese, but it can offer limited protection if the person in question can show they are morbidly obese (100 percent over ideal weight) or that obesity is the result of a physiological symptom. Additionally, if an employer is considered to have perceived an impairment that would be covered under the statutes, then the obese employee may similarly be protected.

But what about ethics?

Other than in Michigan and some cities and counties such as San Francisco, Santa Cruz, Madison and Washington DC, where weight is a protected characteristic in employment law, it appears possible for employers to get away with weight discrimination in many circumstances. But if you were the manager who had to choose whether or not to promote the qualified but obese job candidate, should ethics also come in to play?

Investigation has shown that although many prejudices against overweight people exist, none of these are actually supported by evidence. Though some obese people may indeed be lazy, unambitious and unintelligent, such is the case with an equal number of people of average weight. Discrimination is in the majority of cases little more than ungrounded bias. A reason this subsists is that unlike factors such as gender and race, weight is a characteristic that most of us perceive as something we can control. There is therefore little sympathy for the obese person, who should to many minds simply find some willpower and lose the weight.

Whether or not there are grounds to discriminate against the obese from an ethical point-of-view though, the problem continues. Despite what his or her conscience might say, the manager considering the promotion to sales consultant will naturally think about the bias of others and what sort of image the obese candidate will project for the company when they go looking to form new business relationships. This is testament to an issue that pervades a western society, which is increasingly obsessed with body image – an issue that is so ingrained that is very difficult for an organization to know to how combat it.

Some suggestions that have been put forward include introducing optional and enforced health care schemes at work, whereby employees are rewarded for and assisted in pursuing a healthy lifestyle and working on an organization culture in which discrimination is simply

“Weight is a characteristic that most of us perceive as something we can control.”

unacceptable in any form. A fair-minded organization may also commit not to discriminate against overweight people on the grounds of perceived costs, to test aptitudes fairly and put them first and foremost in making decisions and to make steps to prevent disparate treatment of overweight females, who are the major sufferers with this type of discrimination.

With the number of obese people constantly going up – 54 percent of the US population are now overweight and 34 percent are obese – there is increasing need to address discrimination against the overweight. Yet how far ethics will ever significantly come into play in these business situation always remains under question, and even more difficult is suggesting and implementing a solution that can combat such a widespread stereotype. As the dilemma continues, we may be left wondering whether or not organizations can and should take on responsibility for overcoming what is essentially a cultural and societal problem.

Comment

This is a review of “Fat chance (diversity management)” by Fryer and Kirby (2005), “Bias, discrimination, and obesity” by Puhl and Brownell (2001) and “Weight discrimination in the American workplace: ethical issues and analysis” by Roehling (2002).

Fryer and Kirby present a hypothetical case study, which looks at the issues that arise when an obese individual seeks promotion at work. The article considers the situation from all angles, looking at attitudes of peers, the issues such as ethical obligations, healthcare management and legal repercussions that the company has to consider, and also the effect on the morale and career of the obese individual.

“Bias, discrimination, and obesity” argues that obese people suffer clear and consistent discrimination in employment, education and health care. Taking the results of various investigations and studies into how overweight people are perceived and treated, it shows that discrimination is a real problem and suggests that it also exists in areas such as housing, adoption and jury selection. Raising unresolved issues such as blame and disability, the article concludes by suggestion further research.

Mark V. Roeling considers to what extent the disparate treatment of job applicants or employees based on their weight is ethically justified. Concentrating on the American workplace, the article details the legal requirements employers face when it comes to discrimination, noting that the obese are poorly protected. It asks whether or not discrimination based on weight is more acceptable than that based on gender or race, and considers what steps employers can make to fulfill their ethical as well as legal obligations.

Keywords:
Equal opportunities,
Obesity,
Human resource
management,
Discrimination

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When the rhetoric doesn't match the reality: equality and diversity in recruitment and retention of staff

While many organizations claim to practice non-sexist and non-racist recruitment policies, in reality white males have unfair advantages, both at job interviews, and later during job evaluations

Recruitment and retention of female and minority ethnic staff

How did you find your last position? Did you see it listed at a local employment agency? Perhaps you responded to an advert in a national newspaper. Or maybe an old friend from university gave you a quiet hint that his firm was recruiting and you were a near match for the job specification. The way you answered this question gives a good indication of your gender and/or ethnic background. While these are the three main routes to a job application, white males are much more likely to find out about vacancies through informal friendship networks. "The old boys' network" may be a cliché but it is still active on the golf course, at the college reunion and down at the pub.

Women and ethnic minority candidates, therefore are already disadvantaged before the application process begins, as the only positions open to them are those that have been publicly advertised. Let's suppose then, that you are a white, or ethnic minority female (remembering that these are not mutually exclusive terms) or an ethnic minority male and you are searching for that perfect job by scouring the newspapers and regularly visiting the local employment agency. What would make you want to apply for a particular post? As a reader of quality business journals, we will assume that you are well educated, ambitious and looking for a position where your skills and experience will be valued. Perhaps an organization's recruitment literature featuring female or ethnic minority employees might attract you. According to Ng and Burke (2005) this may be true as their research suggests that Black males are most likely to apply for jobs when the promotional literature shows Black executives. However McKay and Avery (2005) caution that this may be misleading and some ethnic minority applicants are wary of taking such literature at face value. It is all very well to show photographs of a large number of female or ethnic minority employees in a brochure, but this may not be an accurate representation of the percentage of such staff in the organization. Misrepresenting the workplace population can lead to rapid turnover of female and ethnic minority employees which may only serve to convince the HR department that white males make the best employees as they stay in post the longest! Therefore, firms need to spend more time and effort on retention of women and ethnic minority employees before rushing to increase recruitment.



Diversity management and affirmative action

One tactic that has been very successful in recruiting and retaining female and BME (Black and minority ethnic) staff is an organizational commitment to diversity management. While some HR departments might argue that as they practice affirmative action (AA), they have no need of diversity management. This is untrue. Diversity management and AA are two

“While one might hope that twenty-first century organizations would apply diversity management to make the world a better place, the ethos of most commercial enterprise is closely allied to the profit margin.”

quite distinct beasts. Affirmative action sets quotas for the recruitment of staff from particular gender and ethnic groups. This actually leaves the door wide open for discrimination to take place in an environment that may be overtly or covertly sexist or racist. Comments such as: “there were better male candidates but we were down on our quota for women” or “we needed more Black faces, that’s why he was appointed” are devastating, not only for the individuals targeted, but also for the culture of the organization. In fact Ng and Burke (2005) suggest that women and BME candidates have become very wary of AA for the way it can make them feel stigmatized. A person who feels this way is unlikely to put his/her heart and soul into excelling at the job, thus perpetuating the myth of poor performance from employees of a particular gender or ethnicity.

Diversity management is quite another story and there is evidence that organizations dedicated to this concept are successful at attracting the very best and brightest candidates, regardless of ethnicity or gender. These firms are also very attractive to women and BME candidates because of their commitment to create a real culture of equity and opportunity in the workplace. Diversity management has many aspects. It values employees, provides education on issues around diversity and equity, ensures equal opportunities for professional development and promotion for all staff and offers challenge and responsibility commensurate to qualifications and experience. No wonder companies practicing this are attractive to high-flyers! Ng and Burke’s (2005) research with Ontario MBA students demonstrated this clearly. In essence it is all about person-organization (P-O fit), which indicates congruence between the values of an organization and the needs of the employee. Many employees indicate that they put the choice of organization over the choice of job. After all, once your feet are under the desk, you may discover other opportunities within the organization. Conversely, a “dream” job can turn into a nightmare if you feel under valued or stigmatized by your managers or work-mates.

Nacro: getting it right

A very good example of an organization that has successfully implemented diversity management is the British charity, Nacro. Nacro is dedicated to making society safer through the rehabilitation of prisoners and interventions with at-risk groups to prevent criminal behavior by strategies including education and life skills training. You might think charitable organizations must be better at treating employees fairly and promoting good working practices than commercial firms. However, Godwin (2005) points out that charities in the UK actually lag behind other public sector and commercial organizations in introducing clear equality and diversity policies and the commitment which won Nacro The British Diversity Award in 2005 is very special. Nacro’s race equality advisor, Kubil Shergill admits that despite the fact that the charity has had an equal opportunities policy since 1983, the charity was once much better at caring for its clients than for its employees. Shergill’s appointment in 2001 was an attempt to address this as was Nacro’s new equality and diversity policy which came out in 2002.

What makes Nacro special is evident in the wide range of issues that have been tackled in order to make the charity a better working environment for employees from all backgrounds. Nacro targets under-represented groups such as asylum seekers and refugees and has set goals for numbers of female and BME candidates, particularly in management positions. This is important because although some firms claim that women or BME candidates are actually advantaged in terms of selection, Petersen *et al.* (2005) demonstrate that on closer

investigation, this relates to low paid jobs in service industries and not to the higher paid technical or managerial posts. The inequities are not confined to the gap between technical/managerial and service positions. Apparently discrimination exists even within service industries. An example given by Petersen *et al.* (2005) was that expensive high class restaurants employ male waiters and pay them well. The local hamburger joint or diner employs female waitresses and rewards their efforts with a meager pay packet.

Although Nacro's recruitment quotas may be as admirable as they are ambitious (they want 60 percent of senior management posts to be filled by women by 2007 as well as stating that 20 percent of all managers should come from BME groups), as pointed out earlier, it is the retention strategies that are the key to a diverse and happy workforce.

Nacro has a number of strategies from banning age discrimination so that older employees are not excluded from training or promotion, and may choose to work beyond the traditional retirement age, to educating staff about diversity issues. Recent staff training has focused on issues such as disability, religion and sexual orientation.

Shergill's position ensures that equality issues are constantly brought to the attention of the senior management team as she works from the chief executive's office and attends all board meetings, although she is not a member of the board herself. The benefits of this strategy are highlighted by the charity's new dignity at work policy, designed to tackle harassment and bullying. Shergill initiated an audit of quality and diversity in practice and discovered that 10 percent of staff had experienced some form of bullying. However, about 60 percent of these incidents went un-reported as the employees concerned were reluctant to discuss the problem with managers. Nacro initiated new procedures to deal with the issue so that now employees can feel confident that discriminatory behavior of any kind will not be tolerated within the workplace.

The importance of audit

Audit is, in fact a tried and tested strategy for improving equality and diversity. McKay and Avery (2005) point out that an audit enables employers to identify where their female and BME employees are working and where they are under-represented. An audit can be used to elicit the frank opinions of workers about what it is like to be female or from an ethnic minority group in that particular workplace. In a more sophisticated incarnation, an audit can also be used to review the values of an organization to ensure that they reflect the needs and attributes of its most valuable asset, the employees. Ng and Burke (2005) suggest that while white males hold power in organizations, their attributes will be considered the "right" ones for business. Characteristics associated with particular genders or ethnic groups may be discounted as: "not the way we do business here!" rather than being recognized as strengths that enhance the way in which the company works. McKay and Avery (2005) suggest that any company wishing to improve its ratio of female and BME staff should concentrate on diversity management before recruitment. Once the working conditions are right, women and BME candidates will be attracted to the organization and seek employment within it. They advise using the services of a diversity consultant to do the audit initiating the process. Involving an outside consultant will increase the validity of the audit and ensure that all relevant aspects are considered and included. He or she may also be able to make suggestions for improving the workplace environment and culture once the audit data has been analyzed.

“‘The old boys’ network’ may be a cliché but it is still active on the golf course, at the college reunion and down at the pub.”

Diversity and equality are more than pretty words

It is easy to talk about diversity and equality. The words roll smoothly off the tongue but to effect change they have to become more than honeyed terms. Indeed, diversity and equality must be lodged in the heart and soul of any organization serious about improving the working lives of female and BME employees. While one might hope that twenty-first century organizations would apply diversity management to make the world a better place, the ethos of most commercial enterprise is closely allied to the profit margin. However, that is not all bad news. As Ng and Burke (2005) demonstrated, the best educated and most able candidates are attracted to an environment that embodies diversity and equality. Therefore, company managers can do the "right thing" in terms of creating a gender and BME balanced workforce where true opportunity exists for everyone, and they can do it while watching their share prices rise!

Comment

This review is based on "Diversity management and ethnic minority recruitment" by McKay and Avery (2005), "Person-organization fit and the war for talent: does diversity management make a difference?" by Ng and Burke (2005), "Getting hired: sex and race" by Petersen *et al.* (2005) and "Nacro: an equality and diversity winner" by Godwin (2005). The three articles by McKay and Avery; Ng and Burke; and Godwin were relevant, up to date and readable. Godwin's article was especially well laid out with bullet points down the side of each page highlighting the main points contained on the page. Separate text boxes provided background information about the charity and its work. I thought this was very interesting. In fact it stimulated me to visit Nacro's web site to learn more. Petersen *et al.*'s paper, while containing some relevant information was quite ponderous with lots of statistical data which was not easy to interpret at a glance. Some descriptive statistics using bar graphs or pie charts would have been more reader-friendly. In addition, the research presented used a case study methodology. While this can be interesting and informative, the case studies were not clearly structured and the major one examined data collected over ten years ago. In terms of diversity and equality, I wondered whether the findings were still valid.

Keywords:

Equal opportunities,
Employment,
Recruitment,
Job evaluation

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When's it due?! Not the baby, the lawsuit

Pregnancy discrimination in the US

In 2004, women made up 46 percent of the US workforce. That is almost half; it can no longer be considered a minority. What is the number one thing that this half of the workforce complains about? Pregnancy discrimination. Charges of this sort are the fastest-growing type of discrimination complaints filed with the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission (EEOC). Despite growing legislation in support of employees facing pregnancy discrimination, it is a tricky task to prove that Mary did not get the raise because she's in the family way, and not because she's not "fulfilled her potential".

It is a subject that is not often talked about, in fact, the pregnant employee is often referred to as "a missing person in management research", yet it appears that this is set to change. The EEOC records a rise in complaints about pregnancy discrimination as the birth rate falls, it is a more common complaint than sexual harassment and sexual discrimination, according to some women's advocacy groups.

So what counts as discrimination? Obviously if a manager is found to have said "we won't employ you because you're pregnant", it is a clear cut case. But what if a woman was not employed because the employer thought she was likely to get pregnant? Is that allowed? Well, the short answer is no. Denial of benefits, leave pay, sick pay, and job termination are all common problems faced by pregnant women. Since 1978 the law has prohibited this kind of discrimination, yet there are still court cases being raised by women who claim they were discriminated against at work because of their pregnancy.

Cases in recent years

In 2004, a woman tried to sue her potential employer for pregnancy discrimination, as she "understood" her interviewer's comments to mean that they would not hire anyone who was pregnant. The case was eventually thrown out because the woman could not prove that she had interpreted the comments correctly.

In 2004, a woman lost a lawsuit against her employer, "Panos Hotel Group", for demotion due to pregnancy; because she could not prove she was meeting the expectations of her employer at the time, and had no evidence that her demotion was connected to her pregnancy.

Even though these cases were not successful, defending such an accusation is costly and time-consuming, and puts the company's HR practices in a bad light. So the onus is on the employer to ensure they cannot be considered to be discriminatory to a pregnant employee. Pregnancy is a stressful time for a woman, particularly one at work, and employers should make their policies and responsibilities clear to employees. It is unfair to put a pregnant employee through the stress of job instability, financial worry, and fear of employment

“Pregnancy discrimination is a more common complaint than sexual harassment and sexual discrimination.”

termination. It is also worth remembering that even though these cases were not settled in the employees favor, one assumes something must have been seriously amiss to make a pregnant woman go through the stress of a court case.

The official word

A brief run-down of the US laws on pregnancy discrimination:

- Employers cannot refuse to employ a woman because she is pregnant, because of a pregnancy-related condition, or because of the prejudices of customers or co-workers.
- An employer cannot set a predetermined length of time for the employee to come back after childbirth.
- An employer is required to hold a pregnant employee's job open whilst she is on maternity leave.
- Any health insurance provided by the employer must cover pregnancy-related conditions.
- Pregnancy-related benefits cannot be restricted to just married employees.
- Employers must not retaliate against any individual opposing employment practices on the grounds of pregnancy discrimination.

In 1993 the United States Congress passed another law (the Family and Medical Leave Act), parts of which were aimed at protecting the rights of pregnant women at work. Employers covered under this law are required to provide eligible employees 12 weeks of unpaid leave for the birth of a child, whilst maintaining the provision of health care benefits, and keeping the employee's job (or equivalent) open.

Preventing pregnancy discrimination

An increasing amount of women stay in employment for the majority of their pregnancy, and, as such, may not be able to undertake certain tasks that they were capable of doing before. The employer has a legal responsibility to these women to keep them employed; therefore it is advisable to look at options such as flexible working, working from home, transfer to somewhere closer to home, and alternative assignments.

Other suggestions made in the article include:

- recognize the contribution of women in the workplace;
- educate current staff and managers to know their rights and responsibilities;
- allow time for explanations for unexplained absences: pregnancy can have sudden complications;
- do not hold a grudge if the employee has complained;
- do not reward female employees who have not had children; and
- get to know the law – not knowing is not enough of a defense.

Comment

This is a review of “New developments concerning pregnancy discrimination in the workplace” by Dixit and Kleiner (2005). Based on a legal footing, it provides good

“ It is unfair to put a pregnant employee through the stress of job instability, financial worry, and fear of employment termination.”

Keywords:

Pregnancy,
Discrimination,
United States of America,
Employment legislation

information about exactly what a US employer should be adhering to in terms of their pregnant staff, and offers advice to employers about avoiding potential expensive lawsuits. Considering that 46 percent of the workforce are women, and 80 percent of those women will produce children, it is a topic not often covered, and this article highlights some important facts about pregnancy at work. A must for any HR personnel, particularly in the USA.

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Linda Wirth: trends in female employment

Interview by Sarah Powell



Linda Wirth

Linda Wirth is Senior Gender Specialist in the ILO Bureau for Gender Equality, with responsibility for policy and institutional development work in the implementation of gender mainstreaming strategy.

In a career with the ILO in Geneva spanning 17 years, Ms Wirth has been involved in research into a variety of issues relating to women workers, their development, employment opportunities and working conditions, government and organizational goals and legislative frameworks. One of her most recent assignments has been the co-ordination of the ILO's first participatory gender audit, the first of its kind in the UN system.

Ms Wirth is the author of *Breaking through the Glass Ceiling: Women in Management*, a book published by the ILO in 2001, which was based on international research focusing on the challenges to equality for women in the workplace and notably at management levels

Since publication of your study *Breaking through the Glass Ceiling* in 2001, have there been any improvements in the position of women in the job market overall and in reaching top jobs?

The absence of comparative data makes it difficult to trace trends. That said, overall there would appear to be gradual improvement taking place in many countries despite some stagnation or even backsliding in some European countries. As far as women in top jobs are concerned, there is only one organization, the US Catalyst Group, that keeps tabs on developments. It reports a slowly growing percentage of women in top jobs but their share remains very small – some 5 or 6 percent of the most senior positions. Nevertheless this marks a slight improvement since our book came out.

Within the overall picture there are some sectors such as engineering where progress is particularly slow. In the job market as a whole, however, more and more women are running their own businesses.

***Breaking through the Glass Ceiling* advocates improved education for women as one route to career progression. Increasing numbers of women are already undertaking management education in many countries. Is this having an effect?**

This takes time. When you look at what is happening today, for example, you need to backtrack 20 years to gauge the role of education. This rather complicates our research work. Certainly increasing numbers of women are now completing courses of all kinds, and at high levels. At secondary school level, in some countries, the better school performance of girls compared with boys is even a matter of concern. But how all that will be “translated” in the job market 20 years down the road is something we shall have to wait to see. Personally I am optimistic about the outcome. I do not necessarily expect smooth progress but I do believe that the sheer critical mass of young women going into many different fields will make a difference.

Your 2001 report highlighted the particular problems encountered by women aspiring to top private-sector management jobs, despite constituting a growing proportion of the workforce. This is noted even in regions such as Scandinavia that is generally considered advanced in Europe in terms of female participation in the workplace. What do you see as the main impediments to female career progression?

The Scandinavian findings were quite surprising. These countries are very advanced in terms of support to working women, equality of pay, childcare and so on. But the job market is still very segregated in terms of what we might call “men’s jobs” and “women’s jobs”. It is interesting to note, for example, that Scandinavian governments offer generous leave packages for childcare that are also available to men, but it is the women who take these. This is often the result of a family decision. The man may enjoy a higher salary, facing pressure at work; he may not wish to be considered feminine. This situation is slowly changing but, in terms of basic occupational segregation, the situation is very similar around the world. This is particularly accentuated in the private sector where management is generally seen as a male job.

A major impediment to female career progression is society’s attitude to employment and consequent early child development in terms of what is suitable for boys and what is suitable for girls. This is based on their sex not on individuality and it persists throughout education. Employers simply reflect society’s views.

Women high-flyers always report discrimination and stereotyping in the workplace. They have to work twice as hard as their male peers, exceeding performance expectations, to prove themselves. High-level men for their part claim women do not have the background or the experience – which is also true. Women in the past were not exposed to all a company’s operations; they did not work in strategic areas. That is why I say we need to look back over twenty years to gauge trends.

The desire of many women to combine family and career would seem still to pose a problem in career planning and progression. Are there any signs that the workplace is changing to accommodate these sometimes conflicting demands?

Work for women goes hand-in-hand with life and unfortunately it seems that high-level management requires many hours of work and some sacrifice of personal life. The question is to what extent people, whether they be male or female, are willing to accept this. All depends on individual levels of ambition and also the prevailing norm in a company or organization. A lack of visibility early on in a person’s career affects what happens later in terms of advancement and this poses a particular risk for a woman seeking to juggle career and family commitments.

A push for change in attitudes and workplace organization will have to come from women themselves. That has always been the case. Women will have to fight for change, so much depends on their motivation.

How would you explain women’s proportionately greater representation at higher levels in public bodies compared with private companies?

I should add that women also experience difficulties in public organizations, notably in such bodies as law tribunals where men are far more prominent. However, there is legislation in most countries to promote equality, which means there is pressure on governmental organizations to practice what they preach. In addition, in the past the public sector was traditionally seen as more privileged in terms of security, working time, equal opportunities, pay and so on, which may have attracted more women.

Are there sectors where women are making notable inroads in terms of senior positions?

In general women are progressing and I certainly do not want to suggest that women are all stuck at the bottom of the pile and all men are reaching the top. The way we illustrated this progress in the book was through the notion not only of a glass ceiling, but also of glass walls. What we have noted is that, where women progress within an organization, they go up what we could describe as the sides of a pyramid. They may then reach a point at which they

can climb no further. This tends to be within company services such as communications, human resources, accounting departments and so on.

Women are making such inroads in these areas that they are almost becoming “feminized”. Education offers another example. At primary level teaching is a feminized profession. At higher levels women are starting to make more inroads although men tend to hold on to top positions, being principals and so on. This also raises the question of how healthy it is for a profession to become feminized. We need men in education, for example, as role models.

You note that the situation in some developing countries is far superior in terms of female representation in administrative and managerial positions. To what do you attribute this?

While there is not much research on this, we believe it has to do with a very different family set-up in those countries and the availability of domestic help. On the one hand there are still many extended families, although the tendency is also towards nuclear families; this means there are relatives who can help out with the household and children. On the other hand domestic labor is easily available and affordable. Women from wealthier families are educated, often having an international education. As fewer people are educated overall, they stand out. While women in these countries probably still suffer from stereotypes, the difficulty of combining work with family is less of an issue.

You report that many women have abandoned large firms, “taking their energy and know-how to smaller and more flexible companies or setting up their own businesses”. Can you elaborate?

Yes, we have noted that many have left multinational companies particularly because they seek more flexibility and recognition. They then tend to become outside suppliers to the large companies – that’s a general trend in developed countries. In developing countries meanwhile we are seeing the creation of many microbusinesses supplying goods such as agricultural products. So there are strong entrepreneurial trends at different levels. There is also considerable networking by some of these women and it sometimes extends across borders. The internet enables women to network more easily.

How important to job progression are factors such as networking, and are women any less accomplished at this?

I think there’s more pressure on women to divide their time between home and work and this limits the amount of socializing they can do, especially after hours. But companies that want to promote women often provide opportunities for networking, which is important, sometimes within a group of companies within a city or locality in order to ensure there is mutual support on strategies. That is also linked with an effort to mentor women who may miss out on the mentoring men receive through the informal networks to which they belong. Many women also belong to professional associations of one kind or another and more experienced women within them can offer support to the younger women.

What are seen as predominately female “soft skills” are, allegedly, valued. Given all that has been written about the importance in modern management of these, are companies becoming more interested in recruiting women?

While there has been much discussion of this, I’m not really sure how important this is considered. There may be an understanding that these skills are important for the bottom line, but they’re not necessarily associated directly with women.

The message we are trying to put across is that the attributes of both sexes are important for outcomes; a mix of complementary skills is what is important. We could cite, for example, one interesting study of the New York stock exchange which showed that where companies had gone public, those that had a mix of men and women at top management performed better.

There is now a growing trend in Anglo-Saxon countries in which American companies operate to adopt a “diversity management” approach. This is also catching on in Europe. It is based on the idea that each individual has something unique to offer. The approach was born out of the need to reflect all the values found in the different communities in a multiracial society such as that in the USA. But it also extends to issues such as disability and gender. While we’re not convinced that this is really a substitute for traditional affirmative action, it is

an interesting approach in terms of equality while it avoids the negative connotations of affirmative action. Our view is that more objective approaches and criteria in recruitment and interviewing would go some way to solve the latter problem.

What is the role of the ILO in promoting more equitable female participation and remuneration in the workplace and, notably, management?

We work at different levels. One aspect of our role is to give advice on labor legislation to governments and trade unions, to promote ratification of legislation and encourage the development of programs and campaigns. The ILO has passed 183 conventions. Of these, eight are what we call fundamental conventions, covering four areas: child labor, forced labor, freedom of association (which covers the activities of trade unions and employers' organizations) and discrimination. There are two important conventions under discrimination, one covering discrimination generally, the other concentrating on equal pay for work of equal value. We have two other important, albeit not "fundamental" conventions, one on work and family, addressing issues relating to workers with family responsibilities, and the other on maternity protection – an important area because in many countries there's discrimination based on pregnancy. Together these conventions establish a set of what we could call basic rights.

In addition, through our gender equality programs we work to raise awareness of equality issues and offer a selection of training programs to our constituents, i.e. trade unions, employers' organizations and labor ministries.

In addressing the needs of employers and companies, we also have programs focusing on productivity. The basic line of the ILO is that good working conditions and respect for core labor standards go hand-in-hand with improved productivity – and gender equality is part of the equation. The bottom line is that social programs contribute to economic progress.

How can the business impact of diversity and inclusion be quantified?

What is the focus of your own work at the ILO at present?

Currently I'm involved in research into organizational cultural change. Whether you look at the private or the public sector and examine the reasons behind the differences in men and women's career paths, you will still find the social aspect of discrimination that we have already discussed. Imported into the workplace and organizational culture this is a very strong impediment to gender equality. In the Gender Bureau in which I work, we are endeavoring to tackle the issue of organizational equality. This is interesting work because it goes beyond gender. It includes such imperatives as good management, good communications, teamwork and so on, which are good not only for gender but for productivity or any other organizational goals, as said. To achieve this we are developing "gender auditing" as a methodology and process. This we are exploring through a participatory approach in the sense of getting people in an organization to sit down and think things through, challenging the status quo. We believe this is a better approach than simply issuing policy directives or even training which will not necessarily bring the desired results.

Keywords:
Employment,
Women,
Glass ceilings

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Ensuring harmony in the workplace

The issues faced by managers in creating a “level playing field”

Introduction

In today's diverse and multi-cultural workplace, employees of different backgrounds, religions, educational standards and work experience must work alongside each other. This poses a considerable dilemma for managers when rewarding staff for good work, or when considering issues such as promotion or pay increases. How can these different groups be handled fairly and consistently to avoid feelings of favoritism, resentment and jealously brewing up and impacting negatively on the creation of a harmonious working environment?

One suggestion that has been made is establishing a workplace where no employee is advantaged or disadvantaged because of his or her background – a so-called “level playing field” policy.

However, although on the face of it this policy may seem to be the natural fair way forward, it has been shown that even this approach can cause problems. Employees who have been traditionally advantaged in the past suddenly feel that less qualified members of disadvantaged groups may get preferential treatment.

On the other hand, members of traditionally disadvantaged groups do not support methods to create the “level playing field” in their favor if these are based on “reverse discrimination.”

Opposition towards the creation of the “level playing field” is known as “backlash.” Burke describes backlash as:

Any form of resistance men exhibit towards policies, programs and initiatives undertaken by organizations to promote the hiring and advancement of marginalized groups. This resistance can take many forms, both overt and covert.

Despite the best attempts to avoid favoritism, there are underlying trends that complicate the process. We often see job advertisements posted which clearly state that applications from women, and other non-traditional groups, are particularly welcomed and that firms are committed to employment equity. Such bold statements clearly defeat the purpose of any “level playing field” policy.

In addition, research has shown that whilst more men than women currently receive promotions, the percentage of women receiving promotions during the past five years has increased at a faster rate than the percentage of men.

Analyzing backlash in the workplace

There is no doubt that backlash in the workplace needs to be controlled. It can have extremely negative consequences such as the outpouring of tensions, anger, resentment and frustration.

To clearly determine the causes and effects of backlash in the workplace a large Canadian financial services organization carried out an attitude survey. The company supported the "level playing field" principle, but had historically not been particularly active in supporting the career development and advancement of historically disadvantaged groups.

Methodology

Data were collected from 2,514 employees. Most employees had over 20 years service and about one fifth had people management responsibilities. Questionnaires were sent to employees at their office address. Anonymity was guaranteed.

The following question was posed by the survey:

In trying to provide equal opportunities for the following groups – employees with disabilities, aboriginal employees, racial or visible minorities and women – it seems our organization has done:

- far too much;
- more than it should;
- as much as it should;
- less than it should; or
- far too little.

Results

The survey produced a series of clear outcomes:

- 75 percent of employees thought their company had done the right amount in supporting the identified groups;
- this figure was fairly constant across the four groups;
- women thought the company did less for women and more for aboriginal people than men did;
- males saying the company had done too much tended to be at lower organizational levels and had been with the company longer;
- men believing the company had done too much and women believing the company had done too little indicated more negative work experiences and outcomes; and
- men thinking the company had done too little also indicated a more negative picture of organizational functioning.

How to deal with backlash in the workplace

Many organizations have resigned themselves to the fact that backlash is present and real, and have tried to develop effective strategies for dealing with it. These include:

- ignore it – it is inevitable and devoting energy to it may detract from key goals;
- punish it – adopt a zero tolerance approach;
- co-opt resisters; and
- acknowledge and educate – let feelings be open and expressed.

Tips for dealing with backlash in the workplace

A woman heading up the equality initiative in a major bank has offered these two key tips:

1. Stress the benefits of supporting the advancement of non-traditional managers to all employees.
2. It is much better to prevent destructive myths than it is to react to them once they are full-blown.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that backlash exists in many organizations. If left uncontrolled this can have a very negative impact on the workplace. Anxieties and hostilities can grow out of proportion and explode into clear demonstrations of anger, resentment, jealousy and frustration.

Although some initial analysis backlash has been conducted, there still remains much to be done. For example, future research could be expanded much broadly into the following areas:

- men's attitudes towards women's equality;
- overt and covert manifestations of male backlash;
- the role of peer groups in maintaining backlash;
- the consequences of backlash;
- the antecedents of backlash – societal, organizational and personal; and
- the evaluation of different initiatives for effectively addressing backlash.

Comment

This review is based upon "Backlash in the workplace," by Burke (2005), Schulich School of Business, York University, Toronto, Canada.

The article discusses the effects of backlash in the workplace, presents results of a survey conducted by a large Canadian financial organization and offers managers a series of tips for how to deal with backlash.

Reference

Burke, R.J. (2005), "Backlash in the workplace", *Women in Management Review*, Vol. 20 No. 3, pp. 165-76.

Keywords:
Workplace,
Employee involvement,
Complaints,
Disadvantaged groups

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A review of selected management articles from over 400 of the world's top management publications.

Keywords: *Directors, Organizational performance, Senior management, Women executives*

A few good women – on top management teams

Krishnan, H.A. and Park, D., Journal of Business Research, December 2005, Vol. 58 No. 12, Start page: 1712 (9 pages)

Purpose – To investigate the impact of female representation on top management teams (TMTs) on the performance of *Fortune* 1000 companies. *Design/methodology/approach* – Extends Hambrick and Mason's upper echelon framework to the issue of gender. Reviews the existing literature on the role of gender diversity in TMTs and considers the moderating role of environment characteristics such as munificence, dynamism and complexity. Analyses a sample of almost 700 organizations drawn from the 1998 *Fortune* 1000. *Findings* – Obtains strong support for the hypothesis that the greater the proportion of women on the TMT, the better the organizational performance. Finds no evidence for the impact of any of the three environmental variables on organizational performance and considers whether that is a consequence of selecting a sample that operates in complex economic conditions and therefore shows little variation between companies in the economic characteristics of the business environment. *Research limitations/implications* – Raises questions as to how membership of women in the TMT adds value to the organization. *Originality/value* – Provides large-sample support for the direct impact of TMT women on organizational performance in *Fortune* 1000 firms.

ISSN: 0148-2963

Reference: 35AA827

Keywords: *Diversity management, Equal opportunities, Government agencies, Learning and Skills Council, United Kingdom*

The Learning and Skills Council – mainstreaming equality and diversity

Foster, C., Equal Opportunities Review, December 2005, No. 148 Issue: 148, Start page: 7 (6 pages)

Purpose – Describes how the UK Learning and Skills Council has mainstreamed equality and diversity across the organization. *Design/methodology/approach* – Points out that the council was given a statutory duty to promote equality in the areas of gender, race and disability. Explains how it has done this, highlighting the commitment of senior managers to promoting equality and diversity, the communications strategy that backs this up and the training and monitoring system that support the progress being made. Outlines the practical measures, including local initiatives, that the council has put in place to develop equal opportunities. *Findings* – Cites the race equality scheme consultation, publication and training as a major success for the council's equality and diversity strategy. Highlights the development of a single equality scheme as the next challenge facing the council. *Practical implications* – Sets out the practical steps that the Learning and Skills Council has taken to embed equality and diversity within the organization. *Originality/value* – Profiles the equality and diversity strategy at the Learning and Skills Council.

ISSN: 0268-7143

Reference: 35AC504

**Keywords: Age groups,
Employee Attitudes,
Motivation, USA**

Managing your multigenerational workforce

Kyles, D., Strategic Finance, December 2005, Vol. 87 No. 6, Start page: 53 (3 pages)

Purpose – To discuss the management of diverse employee age groups in the US. *Design/methodology/approach* – Identifies the specific strengths and weaknesses of four generations of US employees: matures (born pre-1945), baby boomers (born 1946-1964), generation Xers (born 1965-1979) and nexters (born after 1980). Suggests that, with proper handling, this diversity can increase efficiency and job satisfaction; and briefly discusses some management strategies for making the most of all age groups. *Originality/value* – Looks at how the differences in these age groups affect their attitudes to work.

ISSN: 1524-833X

Reference: 35AD127

**Keywords:
Discrimination,
Equal opportunities, HIV,
Training, United Kingdom**

Out of the shadows (HIV and diversity)

Arkin, A., People Management, 24 November 2005, Vol. 11 No. 23, Start page: 24 (5 pages)

Purpose – Points out that latest drug regimes are enabling people with HIV to continue to carry on in full employment. Discusses how companies can support employees who are HIV positive, underlining the need to tackle any HIV-related discrimination. *Design/methodology/approach* – Describes how GlaxoSmithKline, Barclays and UK public sector organizations have developed anti-discrimination policies which cover HIV/AIDS, noting the debate over whether a specific policy on HIV/AIDS or a more general anti-discrimination policy is better. Outlines how recent UK legislation extends the scope of the UK Disability Discrimination Act 1995 to give people who are HIV positive employment protection from the moment of the diagnosis and discusses how UK employers are complying with this. An inset quotes the example of the work being done by Anglo American at its Goedehoop colliery in South Africa to educate employees about HIV/AIDS prevention, to provide HIV testing and to provide antiretroviral drugs. *Findings* – Underlines the need for UK employers to ensure that they do not discriminate against employees who are HIV positive and highlights the importance of raising awareness among employees about how to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS. *Originality/value* – Highlights the need to stop discrimination against HIV positive employees.

ISSN: 1358-6297

Reference: 35AB005

**Keywords: Age groups,
Ethnic groups, Gender,
Interviewing, Recruitment,
USA**

Relational demography and similarity-attraction in interview assessments and subsequent offer decisions: are we missing something?

Goldberg, C.B., Group and Organization Management, December 2005, Vol. 30 No. 6, Start page: 597 (28 pages)

Purpose – Investigates how similarities between interviewers and job applicants (age race and gender) affect the outcomes of recruitment interviews. *Design/methodology/approach* – Develops a model based on a series of hypotheses concerning the ways that similarities between interviewers and applicants will affect the assessment made of the applicant and whether a job offer will be made. Sets out the model which proposes that observable demographic factors (age, race and gender) will affect perceptions of similarity, which will, in turn, affect the level of interpersonal attraction experienced, and, consequently, the overall interview assessment and the decision on whether to offer the job. Tests out the model and the hypotheses by studying 311 US campus interviews, involving 45 recruiters and 210 applicants. Analyses the responses of the interviewers to two surveys, the first asking for demographic information about themselves and their assessment of the applicants based on the applicants' resumes, the second asking for an assessment of the applicants after the interview. Also analyses which applicants were eventually given a job. *Findings* – Finds that racial similarity had a significant direct effect on the overall interview assessments and the job offer decisions. Also finds that dissimilarity in gender had a significant direct effect on overall interview assessments. Notes that age similarity had no effect. Reports that the

effects of race similarity and gender dissimilarity were mediated by perceived similarity and interpersonal attraction. *Research limitations/implications* – Explains the research methods and the analysis. Sets out the limitations of the research and potential areas for further research. *Originality/value* – Assesses how demographic similarity between interviewers and applicants can affect interview decisions.

ISSN: 1059-6011

Reference: 35AC510

Keywords:

**Age discrimination,
Equal opportunities,
Older employees,
Recruitment, Retention,
Retirement**

Age discrimination rife in the workplace

Equal Opportunities Review, *December 2005, No. 148 Issue 148, Start page: 16 (0 pages)*

Purpose – Examines the extent of age discrimination among UK employers and assesses employers' willingness to adapt their employment practices to enable older workers to remain in work for longer. *Design/methodology/approach* – Summarizes the results of a Chartered Institute Personnel Development and Chartered Management Institute research, which analyzed responses from 2,682 UK managers about their organizations' recruitment, retention, training and retirement policies. Discusses how these would affect older workers. *Findings* – Reports that the stereotypes of older workers as being poorer workers continues to hold sway, although notes that 25 percent of the organization had removed age limits on graduate recruitment schemes while another 25 percent offered fast-track development to people of all ages. However, finds that nearly 25 percent of the organizations used age as a criterion for recruitment decisions and that 20 percent used age as a criterion for redundancy or dismissal. Finds that the managers stated that they would like their organization to offer flexible working to older workers, more flexible pension schemes and the opportunity to work beyond the age of 65. Underlines the gap between these wishes and the actual practices used by employers. Also highlights the belief that employers would find it difficult to enable workers to work beyond age 65. *Research limitations/implications* – Indicates the research method and presents the results of the analysis. *Originality/value* – Offers a snapshot of UK employers' attitudes towards older workers.

ISSN: 0268-7143

Reference: 35AC507

**Keywords: Airlines,
Career development,
Careers, Gender,
Job satisfaction, Libraries**

Men in non-traditional occupations: career entry, career orientation and experience of role strain

Simpson, R., *Gender, Work and Organization, July 2005, Vol. 12 No. 4, Start page: 363 (18 pages)*

Purpose – Studies the careers of men in four non-traditionally male areas of work – nursing, cabin crew, librarianship and primary school teaching. Looks at why the men entered these careers, their attitudes to their careers and if they felt any role strain as men within these careers. *Design/methodology/approach* – Gathers data from 40 in-depth interviews with seven academic librarians, ten primary school teachers, eight cabin crew members and 15 nurses. *Findings* – Finds that 13 of the men had made an active choice of their careers; that nine had made a passive choice and 18 had settled on the career after trying other, more traditionally masculine careers that they had not liked. Reports that 14 of the men were strongly ambitious to reach senior positions within their professions but notes that most of the group, who had settled for the profession after trying out other types of work, were keen to stay close to professional and occupational practice and not move into management. Lastly, finds that many of the men had had adverse reactions from others to their choice of job and that they had developed strategies for avoiding discussing their jobs or for emphasizing the masculine aspects of them. Notes that the homosexual men in the sample felt more comfortable in their roles. *Research limitations/implications* – Discusses the research methods and the limitations. Indicates areas for further research. *Originality/value* – Studies career choice and experience of men in non-traditional careers.

ISSN: 0968-6673

Reference: 34AR604

**Keywords: Directors,
Financial services
industry, United Kingdom,
Women**

A different agenda (women)

Oldfield, C., *Financial World*, December 2005, Start page: 28 (6 pages)

Purpose – To review the reduction of sex discrimination in the UK financial services industry. *Design/methodology/approach* – Hangs commentary about the presence of women in powerful positions in Europe, the wealth of women in the UK, and wage levels relative to men, round the thumbnail career sketches of seven women. Notes the names of six rising women and 11 financial companies that have female directors. *Findings* – Finds that there are several women at senior management level, but there are few precedents at director level to persuade male selectors that women can perform at that level. Proposes a mentoring scheme rather than statutory quotas. *Practical implications* – Demonstrates that the current methods for breaking the glass ceiling have not succeeded. *Originality/value* – Shows that little has really changed in recent years.

ISSN: 1360-4295

Reference: 35AC978

**Keywords:
Collective bargaining,
Equal opportunities,
Trade unions,
United Kingdom**

TUC equality audit 2005: collective bargaining

Equal Opportunities Review, October 2005, No. 146, Start page: 17 (3 pages)

Purpose – Sets out the results of the UK's TUC's second biennial equality audit, looking at the part that focused on examining the extent to which collective bargaining has pursued equalities issues. *Design/methodology/approach* – Summarizes the unions' top equality bargaining priorities and the bargaining successes. Also examines the extent to which the trade unions gave training on equalities bargaining. Lastly looks at the number of unions that have representatives with specific responsibilities for equality issues. *Findings* – Reports that the unions' main priorities were the achievement of equal pay, particularly for women; work-life balance and flexible working; parental rights; and race discrimination and equality issues. *Research implications/limitations* – Sets out the methods used in the audit and statistical analysis of responses. *Originality/value* – Examines how UK trade unions are pursuing an equality agenda.

ISSN: 0268-7143

Reference: 34AZ213

**Keywords:
Communications
technology,
Older employees,
United Kingdom**

Ageism is clogging up the flow of skilled IT workers

Samuels, M., *Computing*, 8 December 2005, Start page: 35 (2 pages)

Purpose – To evaluate the degree to which ageism in the IT workforce is hampering the task of recruiting qualified IT workers and the potential implications of the forthcoming European Union (EU) legislation on ageism. *Design/methodology/approach* – The growing unease in the UK IT industry that the ageing population is going to cause problems with recruiting suitable IT staff in future is discussed against the background of ageism in the workplace that is discriminating against older people who could provide some measure of insurance against the problem that is causing such fears. *Findings* – Companies should actively welcome the European Employment Directive, due to be implemented by Autumn 2006, which aims to provide encouragement for companies that are slow to include both younger and older employees and will provide protection against unfair discrimination for those seeking work, on the grounds that they are too old. Lists some of the items judged by Age Positive, the team working in the Department for Work and Pensions, to be important issues for employers to consider, including: recruitment; selection and interviewing; training and development; promotion; pay and benefits; retention; redundancy; and retirement. *Originality/value* – Provides practical advice to IT companies to prepare for the imminent introduction of the new EU employment legislation, particularly as it related to ageism and the promotion of the employment and retention of older IT workers.

ISSN: 0307-8965

Reference: 35AC932

Suggested reading

One of the best book reviews recently published by Emerald.

Keywords: *Women, Career development*

Supporting Women's Career Advancement: Challenges and Opportunities

Edited by Ronald J. Burke and Mary Mattis, Edward Elgar Publishing, 2005

Two years have passed since I last reviewed from the perspective of a practitioner. That book was also edited by Ronald Burke and the emphasis was on “advancing” women’s careers. This follow-up volume shifts the focus to “supporting” so I was hopeful that the research content would recommend the “how to do it” in addition to providing a fresh take on the current state of play. The stated audiences include practitioners as well as academics. Although I can no longer claim to live the life of an academic, I suspect, like a Catholic upbringing, it is something that always informs one’s view. Therefore, seeing the caliber of the editors and contributors, for me the academic credibility of this book is a given. Academics reading this review will find solid research to add to the basket of knowledge and further research suggestions. However, the introduction (p. 7) acknowledges a deliberate choice of practitioner contributors to close the gap between theory and practical application. At this point in my career, my feet are planted in the field of management consultancy, working for a small New Zealand company, Tall Poppies, which has operated nationally and internationally since 1988. Founded by two women, currently owned and directed by four women, this company strives to integrate business imperatives with values-based leadership. Being a managerial and professional woman, I also bring a personal perspective to a book such as this one. I was eager to discover how useful this book would be for a person like me working with organizations and coaching individual women who are keen to progress their managerial careers.

The five parts to this book provide an initial status report on the past, present and future; followed by research on work, career and life experience; ongoing challenges; best practices for advancing women; finally, a description of two company initiatives for advancing women. Part I provides the backdrop starting with Ronald Burke’s review on progress and obstacles to women’s career advancement. We learn good news and bad news, and for readers steeped in this research, many of the themes will be disturbingly familiar. Recently, I attended a Women’s Convention in Wellington, capital city of New Zealand (NZ), celebrating 30 years since the first such gathering. Certainly, local and national themes from that convention reflected the much bigger picture of statistics and findings presented in this chapter. The pay rates for men and women are still different, women are not figuring much on the boards of private sector companies, women are still leaving organizations to start their own businesses, integrating family life comes at a career cost, gender stereotyping is alive and well, and male CEOs and senior women disagree about the barriers. Generational differences shift the ground somewhat for high achieving women – earlier it was how to fit in and be accepted, now it is how to be a woman leader. At the most positive end of the spectrum, more women are visible in leading roles (ask any red-blooded NZ male who sees himself surrounded by women in leadership roles including the Prime Minister, Governor-General, Chief Justice, Speaker of the House). And for those in organizations, Burke provides the really good news that relevant HRM change initiatives are being increasingly linked to organizational effectiveness.

It is always refreshing to see a contributor from the Antipodes, and Phyllis Tharenou continues with the global view, exploring the perennial issue of women’s under-representation in management. “Worldwide, women on average comprise 20 per cent of managers, with the highest proportion being 45 per cent in the US . . . the higher the management level, the lower the proportion of women” (p. 31). Her analysis using individual,

social and organizational influences has produced a table which is a practitioner's delight. Researchers will also find this chapter poses a number of research questions for the future. And there are findings to shake some of the fundamentals, e.g. while mentors help men they do not seem to help women in the same way to advance to top levels; there is no evidence to suggest family-friendly practices increase women's advancement in management but women-friendly cultures do. It was good to see the final recommendation, that women choose organizations with cultures conducive to advancement on merit, came with the cogent reminder that the women's success in the US mentioned earlier could be explained by their acceptance that the problem rests in the context not the individual.

When reading a book such as this one, without the advantage of being steeped in the literature, a practitioner asks questions similar to the one Ralph Waldo Emerson used to ask his friends when he had not seen them for a while, "what has become clearer to you since last we met?" For this reviewer that question alters slightly to, "is there something new here since last I read? What is provocative or stimulating?" The final chapter in part I talks about puncturing the glass ceiling (GC) and suggested the GC was an artifact of women's career/life choices. I valued the generational perspective and, of course, the inclusion of a Downunder sample (p. 70). A fresh view from the first chapter in part II, incorporating research from The Netherlands and Spain, focused on how perceptions influence careers of men and women. There is satisfying discussion on leadership styles and effectiveness – the facts and the beliefs. The academic reader and the practitioner have plenty more work to do. Leadership images, for men and women, continue to be gendered.

Other contributors provided provocation and stimulation. Marie Line Germain and Terri Scandura advance the role of self-determination in choosing a mentor and their chapter adds productively to the mentoring literature and practice. Formal mentoring programs are so popular within organizations that organizers of these would be pleased to mitigate failure by advocating self-choice. Any baby boomer, particularly a woman of middle age who daily experiences the phenomenon of being invisible, will welcome a chapter which spotlights them as an important part of the workforce, yet overlooked in the research. Chapter 7, "Women at midlife: changes, challenges and contributions," added a new word to my vocabulary "recalibrate". Midlife women "do more than simply adjust previous behaviors and attitudes; they reset the standard, changing the benchmark against which they assess their attitudes, actions and relationships" (p. 129). Thank you, Judith Gordon and Karen Whelan-Berry.

But it was the first chapter in part III "Ongoing challenges" that fully met my expectations as a career coach. Recently, a Chief Executive client asked me to work with a young woman employee who had handed in her notice because her workplace romance had failed. Her manager wanted her to reconsider the decision from the career as well as the personal perspective. Lisa Mainiero's chapter on office romance was such a help. It was refreshing to know the topic is out in the open and this contributor elucidates the ethical dilemmas and the appropriateness of management actions (or in action). This section of the book continued to meet practitioner needs with two chapters on work-life integration. Quotes from Canadian employees tell of strategies that have worked for them and Linda Duxbury and Christopher Higgins also provide practical recommendations to employers. One that stood out for me was the encouragement to introduce new performance measures that focus on objectives, results and outputs "move away from a focus on hours and presenteeism to a focus on output" (p. 206). Work-life balance is another familiar theme and this time the research is from a field where 70 percent of the workforce are women and there is a crippling shortage of expertise. Healthcare case studies illustrate six practices that are working well in the US. Busy organization people will find Peter Weil and Cynthia Kivland's writing very accessible.

The final sections combine best practices and company initiatives for advancing women. I suspect these chapters will have the most appeal for a human resources manager or a consultant. Success stories with enough headings, bullet points and boxes will keep a non-academic reading beyond their usual cut-off point. A large corporate highlights its diversity program's success, "... today women comprise the majority of the Shell Oil

Leadership Team – an unusual phenomenon in an industry that traditionally has been dominated and led by males” (p. 325). The training and development reader will eagerly read about the success of Procter and Gamble’s workshop with the brilliant title, *Sex@Work.shop*. And for the organization person trying to convince others about diversity, Leslie Levin deals with how to market gender and diversity initiatives. However, Mary Mattis and Katherine Giscombe in their respective chapters on engineers and women of color not only provided case studies and easy to read lists of “do-ables” but tackled with verve two of the outstanding tough areas. Recently, a colleague was mentioning issues facing one of her mentees in an engineering company. This young woman had been raised in NZ during the “girls can do anything” campaign. Guiding her to a gendered analysis might take time, but the relief when she sees her experience is not personal inadequacy but blind spots within the profession, will pay dividends. I suggested reading Mary Mattis, the co-editor of this book. The young woman would gain understanding as well as practical strategies.

While the picture looks brighter for some women in the corporate world, particularly in the countries featured in this book, Katherine Giscombe reminds us that women of color experience “a double outsider status in the workplace” (p. 267). Stereotypes associated with race and other barriers produce a “concrete ceiling” (ibid.). Seven change management elements are presented as a framework for action, illustrated with company examples as IBM’s Asian value proposition and Verizon’s performance management process. Given our experience at Tall Poppies that for organization change to occur it has to start within individuals, I welcomed the inclusion of a meaty section on the key role of middle managers. Searching questions assist individual managers to assess their organizations, their policies, work environment and, most importantly, themselves. I was especially taken with the suggestion to join an organization in which you are a minority (p. 290). During a year spent in the US I volunteered at Head Start (a pre-school program for black American children) in South Carolina. In a small but unforgettable way, I learnt about being an outsider.

In conclusion, have the editors achieved their aim? Have they presented academic research and writing which has practical relevance? If I were not a recovering academic, would I have found the chapters easy to read? Overall, I would answer “yes” “yes” and “maybe”. In my dreams, when a book is intended for practitioners, academics will always include a summary of “how to use this” which practitioners can go to straight away leaving fellow researchers to absorb the detail. Then a thought occurs to me – as a consultant it is my job to interpret research findings for others to implement! So, I will use the research and strategies to inform my work, and refer colleagues and clients to specific chapters. Finally, to these leading thinkers and researchers who have contributed to this book, please keep providing women with new career steps and strategies – and keep challenging organizations to reduce the length and slowness of that “long, slow, uphill struggle” (p. 8).

Reviewed by Mary Cull, Management Consultant, Tall Poppies, Wellington, New Zealand.

A version of this review was originally published in Women In Management Review, Vol. 21 No. 1, 2006.

What's on the web

Different and equal

www.eoc.org.uk

The Equal Opportunities Commission deals with sex discrimination and inequality related to gender, including good practice in the fair and equal treatment of men and women. Theirs is a well-designed colorful site with information on campaigns, research, the law and much besides. It is easy to navigate and a great starting point for any HR person looking at gender issues. Particularly useful are the checklist tools – a number of equality checklists designed for managers and supervisors. These help people to avoid sex discrimination and to promote best practice.

Right and wrong

www.drc-gb.org

The UK Disability Rights Commission (DRC) is an independent body established to stop discrimination and promote equality of opportunity for disabled people.

Disabled people of working age are twice as likely as non-disabled people to be out of work and claiming benefits. And disabled people are twice as likely to have no qualifications. The DRC has set itself the goal of “a society where all disabled people can participate fully as equal citizens”.

The site is very clear and easy to use with all the information one could wish for. The only criticism is that it is perhaps a bit too simple and colorful. Not everyone with a disability wants to be presented with a “picture book and crayon” approach.

Good relations

www.cre.gov.uk

The Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) was set up under the 1976 Race Relations Act. It is funded by the Home Office, but works independently of government.

The CRE has three main duties, to work towards the elimination of racial discrimination and promote equality of opportunity, to encourage good relations between people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds and to monitor the way the Race Relations Act is working and recommend ways in which it can be improved.

The site is a model of clarity with only the accessibility options proving a little confusing.

Thinking right

www.ceousa.org

There will be no positive discrimination here. The US Center for Equal Opportunity (CEO) positions itself to counter the “divisive impact of race conscious public policies”. CEO focuses on three areas in particular: racial preferences, immigration and assimilation and multicultural education. Among many elements on this interesting site is an outline of the debate between those who say that US immigrants cannot assimilate and multiculturalists who say that they should not – lessons for many other countries here about how the debate might go.

Resourceful site

www.disabilityinfo.gov

This is a comprehensive federal web site that serves as a one-stop resource for nearly 50 million US citizens with disabilities. Through DisabilityInfo.gov, individuals with disabilities, their family members, job seekers, employers and others can access wide-ranging information covering employment, education, housing, transportation, health, benefits,

technology, civil rights, and community life. Since its inception it has been visited by more than 5 million viewers.

The site provides access to disability-related information and programs available across the US government on numerous subjects, including civil rights, community life, education, employment, housing, health, income support, technology and transport. It is, as one would expect, very user-friendly, with good quick links, clear indexing and a choice of navigation methods. We particularly liked the “accessibility preferences” facility.

Poor stuff

www.diversityworkforce.co.uk

Diversity Worforce, a UK information site, seems, at first glance, to be useful. It is also supported by advertising from such as Ford, West Midlands Police, the Department of Health and other big organizations. But (you could hear a “but” coming I expect) in reality this is a rather weak site. The different sections have very skimpy information (under “diversity law” for example there are only two references) and only three, out of date, under “events”). The pages load so that it looks as if you have never left the home page and have to scroll down to be sure and the whole site seems to be stuck in last October.

This site is billed as “yet another RPM solution” but this link brings up the old “cannot be displayed” message. All in all, a waste of a good opportunity.

And finally

Thomas Jefferson warned in his First Inaugural Address that the American nation could not “countenance a political intolerance.” He stated that they have nothing to worry about in views that differ from their own, as even “error of opinion may be tolerated where reason is left free to combat it.” Think about it.

Thanks to www.newsmax.com for this.

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