

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

1.0 Introduction

In recent years nation-states in many parts of the world have been attempting to improve the status of women in their society. An important element in national policies is the improvement of women's access to a wider range of jobs, including those at a managerial level. Many nations, Great Britain included have introduced legislation to prevent unfair discrimination against women in the workplace. Such legislation in itself cannot bring about the change sought by governments, but it can serve to influence male attitudes towards the role of women at work.

There is still much progress to be made, especially in relation to the appointment of women to middle and senior management roles. It has been estimated (Davidson & Cooper, 1993) that in UK, women hold less than 5% of senior management posts, and perhaps some 26% of all managerial type positions. This is in a situation where they make up more than 40% of the total workforce.

2.0 Social Background

Attitudes towards the role of women as homemakers and/or career people vary from one society to another. Some societies emphasis the woman's role as wife, mother and homemaker. Their attitudes are generally biased against women taking on anything other than relatively low-level, part time work. Education for women in such circumstances tends to be geared towards these assumptions about a woman's role. By comparison, the expectations of men as breadwinners are high, and thus social action is geared to the education, training and support of men in employment. In such a situation the chances of women being able to gain management

positions are poor, except in occupations such as infant teaching, nursing and social work, where women are employed in a professional capacity.

In the UK, major efforts have been made over the past two decades to remove obstacles to women's career development. Legislation such as the Sex Discrimination Act, 1975, and Equal Pay Act, 1970, is aimed at encouraging greater fairness towards women at work. Other efforts to improve the lot of women employees include such developments as WISE (Women into Science and Engineering) and Opportunity 2000 – a program launched in 1991 with the purpose of "increasing the quality and quantity of women's participation in the workforce by the year 2000". Since these various developments, but not necessarily because of them, women have begun to take a more active role in management. An official survey showed that women held about 33% of positions described as Manager or Administrator, but that many of these positions were in traditionally female occupations. In the most senior roles, as already mentioned, women lag far behind men and well out of proportion even to their presence in middle management (Labor Force Survey, 1993).

3.0 Reasons Behind Women's Poor Representation in Management

Several theories have been raised and they are as follows: -

3.1 Sex Differences at Work

Many of the myths about women's needs, wants and capabilities arise from the assumptions that men make about women in the workplace. Research into sex differences at work has tended to focus on identifying physical, cognitive and motivational differences between men and women. Some studies have also examined differences in leadership styles and attitudes towards work. As a general rule, and taking a wide range of studies into account, most of the research indicates that there are few important differences

between the performance of the sexes at work, especially in situations where they are able to compete on equal terms.

Where sheer physical strength is involved men are invariably superior to women, being generally taller, larger and more muscular. However, the occasions nowadays when purely physical strength is called for are very rare in the work environment, and thus the physical differences between the performance of men and women are scarcely relevant. When it comes to mental, cognitive, skills there are noticeable differences between the sexes, but these are linked to particular aspects of intelligence, and not to differences in overall intelligence (Vinnicombe & Colwill, 1995).

Research suggests that, even though women are verbally superior to men, the styles of communication they adopt be devalued at work. She found that women tended to be more polite than men are, had a strong tendency to qualify their statements and tended to use disclaimers. Such deference to others seems to be taken as a sign of weakness and lack of confidence, especially by men, whom she found typically listen less than women, interrupt more and use more aggressive language (Colwill, 1995).

3.2 Organizational Cultures

As for women and organizational culture, Marshall (1993) has the following to say:

"I see male and female values as qualities to which both sexes have access...Women and men are, then, both the same and different. Until recently many researchers have emphasized similarities to win women acceptance in employment. But this theme of equality for similarity has distorted many women's lives

and left organizational cultures largely unchanged by the inclusion of women."

Marshall distinguishes between male and female values. For example male values consist of traits such as self-assertion, separation, control, competition, focused perception, rationality, clarity, discrimination and activity among other. On the other hand, female values consist of traits such as interdependence, cooperation, receptivity, merging, acceptance, awareness of patterns, wholes and contexts, emotional tone, being, intuition and synthesizing.

Organizational cultures have given predominance to male values, which have shaped its organizations, its language and its cultural norms. This leads, she claims, to assumptions that when they are perceived as different to men, women are considered to be inferior.

3.3 Differences in Managerial Skills

On the issue of women and leadership, Eagly & Johnson (1990) conducted a literature review involving 370 comparisons of styles between men and women managers. The conclusion they drew from all the studies they investigated can be summarized as follows: -

3.3.1 Women generally adopted a more democratic or participate style compared with men who tended to prefer an autocratic or directive style.

3.3.2 In contrived settings (i.e. assessments) men tended to be more task oriented than women, but in ordinary work

situations there were no noticeable differences in task orientated styles between the sexes.

3.3.3 In contrived settings (i.e. assessment) women tended to be more interpersonally orientated than men are, but again in the ordinary workplace, no such difference emerged.

Overall, there were fewer differences of leadership style in the workplace than might have been expected, but one consistent difference did remain – women managers were much more likely to adopt a democratic/participate style than their male counterparts. Ironically, such an approach to leadership is the one most favored by modern management gurus.

There have been numerous research studies into possible differences between men and women in such aspects of workplace behavior as motivation, attitudes to work ability to motivate teams and in work performances generally. The overall results demonstrate clearly that on these points there are no major differences between the sexes.

The large majority of the previous investigations show that male and female leaders/managers are by and large similar.

A closer look at international managerial sex typing raises a few questions. Firstly, if there is an international managerial stereotype and how women fare comparatively to men on these possibly universal requisite management characteristics.

In a study that was conducted between management student samples among students from USA, China and Japan to determine

an international managerial stereotype. For the males the characteristics meeting the criteria were leadership ability, ambitious, competitive, desire responsibilities, skilled in business matters, competent and analytical ability. The average ratings of women and of men were compared with the average rating of managers. Women were rated lower than men were on all characteristics in all samples. Across countries, on all items expect competent, the women's mean was significantly lower than the men were.

Looking at the international managerial stereotype items illustrates rather dramatically the unfavorable way in which women are viewed, especially among males. Males management students in five different countries and male corporate managers in the USA, view women as much less likely to have leadership ability, be competitive, ambitious, skilled in business matters, have analytical ability or desire responsibility. If one holds this view, as apparently as most males do, it is no wonder that women are not in managerial positions in the USA (Stroth, et al., 1992)

An early and notable example of the perception that women are not suited for management was a study conducted by Virginia Schein (1973). Schein asked male managers to characterize "women in general", "men in general" and "successful middle managers". The attributes associated with successful managers, including self confidence, forcefulness, ambition and leadership ability were also associated with "men in general" but not with "women in general". Subsequent research has documented the persistence of this perceived mismatch between managerial characteristics and female characteristics a view held by many women and men alike (Ezell,

Odewahn & Scherman, 1980; Dubno, 1985; heilman, Block, Martell & Simon, 1989; Brenner, Tomkiewicz& Schien, 1989; Naff, 1994)

A competing set of studies has sought to prove that women are just as capable of exhibiting leadership qualities as men. These studies focus on gender as a nonsignificant factor. While life experiences may present interact on a temporary basis with gender, gender itself is seen as managerially irrelevant (Duerst-Lahti & Johnson, 1992)

Researchers have also suggested that such stereotypes of women as lacking management potential are part of the "glass ceiling" that inhibits women's career advancement (Gallese, 1991; Merit Systems Protection board, 1992a; Harriman, 1996; Department of Labor, 1991; Kanter, 1977).

The pervasiveness of this stereotype has probably also contributed to findings that some women have less confidence in their job performance in some situations than men (Jackson, Gardner & Sullivan, 1992)

Ironically, while sex role stereotypes can have adverse effects on women's advancement into supervisory and managerial positions, another stream of literature not only recognizes a gender differences but claims that the female approach to management is perhaps better suited to the demands of today's environment than the male approach. Some of this thinking is rooted in studies conducted by Carol Gilligan (1982) from which she concluded that women are guided by a morality of care and responsibility whereas men are oriented toward justice and rights.

3.4 Organizational Barriers

Another set of barriers experienced by women can be classed as organizational barriers. Organizational barriers cannot be thought of however as deliberately designed to impede women's progress in organizations; rather they should be examined and understood as part of the reflections of a culture that emphasize expectations and role descriptions differentiated by sex. Patterns and practices develop that reflect society's views of separate roles. They form the climate of the organization.

Organizational climate can be experienced as supportive or threatening. It refers to the distinction that is created by the organization in the areas of recruitment; selection, placement, compensation and training that differentiate between men and women.

3.4.1.1.1 Placement

Placement function may reflect society's expectations that the feminine role must be supportive. It may reflect an expectation of a particular length of service of female employees. Or it may reflect a psychological posture and a lack of confidence in women's abilities, or a lack of expectation and aspiration for high level jobs among women themselves. Whatever the explanation, women who aspire to progress in the organization must consider the placement and the difference between career progression in support service areas and in primary task areas of emphasis.

3.4.1.1.2 Development

Practices related to training and development functions are also differentiated between males and females. Progress in an organization is a reflection of skill, ability, potential, training and development.

3.5 Role Conflicts

In spite of the increasing number of women entering occupations formerly reserved for men, the management field has become one of the last frontiers of female liberation.

Recent studies reveal that the stereotype of women as lacking the abilities and character traits required of managers is widely held and has contributed to the lack of progress in this area of employment. According to Virginia Schein, of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company a successful manager was perceived to possess the traits of aggressiveness, emotional stability, vigor and self-reliance. Men in general were believed to possess the same attributes ascribed to the successful manager, while women were rated as deficient in most of these characteristics. In another survey of male and female executives conducted by the Harvard Business Review, the majority of male respondents believed women to be unsuited for management because of their "unstable temperaments" (Diphoey, 1975). Another recent survey of executives revealed that females were perceived as less dependable.

These findings confirm Douglas McGregor's observation that the model of a successful manager in our culture is a masculine one. The good manager is aggressive, competitive, firm and just. He is not feminine, he is not soft and yielding or dependent or intuitive in

the womanly sense. The sex typing of management as a male occupation, requiring male traits poses a major barrier to women who would otherwise qualify and excel in positions of leadership. Much of this sex typing is based on myths. To be specific, at least five stereotypes, commonly presented as arguments against women in management, appear to be fallacious.