

INDIAN INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT CALCUTTA
WORKING PAPER SERIES
WPS No. WPS-534/ January 2005

Gender, Work and Organizational Culture

A Southeast Asian Experience



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Abstract

Organizations operate in the social milieu and therefore the socio-cultural factors greatly influence the organizational culture. The Asian societies are patriarchal in nature that gives superior position to a man as compared to a woman. This social role perception (sex role stereotype) seemed to have a bearing on the structural role of men and women in organizations. The present study aimed at examining the impact of social role on organizational culture and managerial work behaviour. The study was conducted in Southeast Asian countries. Hundred twenty-nine male and seventy-six female managers from India, Bangla Desh, Nepal, SriLanka and Korea participated in the study. The overall findings indicated the spill over of socio-cultural values into organizational situations. The managerial behaviour seemed to be culturally influenced. Interestingly, the respondents did not perceive women managers as less competent. Therefore, the results hinted a need for corporate wide mindset change for breaking glass ceiling at the perceptual and attitudinal level first so that things are different and bright at the functional level.

Key words: Structural role, social role and managerial behaviour.

The present paper is extracted from my book, “Women Leadership in Organization: Socio-Cultural Determinants”, 2003.

Women in Management

Many feel that the secondary status of women and the treatment they receive at workplace come from the family spill over into the corporate world. The acculturation of the Indian women has been to be a home-maker and peace-keeper – to be a follower and a loyalist, but never to rock the boat or lead from the front. Just like the family, society and other fields, the world of business too is dominated by men; women are few and far between. Those who have proved outstanding and have made their mark are not looked at with the admiration they deserve; the pervasive assumption is that their success came at the cost of family peace. Even brain scientists have gone back to the laboratory drawing board and have come up with the news that neurological sex differences exist, i.e., that men and women are irrefutably different, like chalk and cheese.

Image of Women Manager in Organizations. The leading argument over the years has been that the abilities and attitudes of the male and female managers are thought to be different. The image of a woman manager has certain beliefs associated with it. These tend to make a woman see unsuitable for managerial posts. In the Indian society there is certain research evidence that shows the presence of sex differences in respect of such variables such as job complexity, internal motivation to work, satisfaction with pay, security and supervision, global satisfaction etc among women bank employees. Such research evidence for managerial job is however scanty (Devanna, 1987).

Many other factors mitigate against full and equal participation of women in a male-dominated profession like management. Spencer and Podmore (1983) have identified certain factors that contribute to professional marginalisation of women in male dominated professions, the most important of which from the point of view of the study carried out could be broadly viewed under two groups:

1. Stereotypes about the nature of professions and about women who work in them, and
2. The assumed lack of professional commitment among women because of their domestic commitments and consequent effects on their prospects for promotion.

The studies carried on the first aspect within an Indian society indicate that sex role stereotypes are to be still found widely prevalent within the society inspite of all the economic and social development taking place in the country. Finding of research in the second area indicate that the prevalence of some of the popular beliefs relating to differing characteristics of men and women that existed across groups and which differed in sex, age, religion, marital status and educational level firstly. Secondly the characteristics ascribed to men are valued more positively than the characteristics ascribed to women (Brevvarman et al.1972). Numerous other investigators have also noted the existence of sex role stereotypes. These stereotypes are widely held (Lunnenborg, 1970), persistent (Fernberger, 1948) and are highly traditional (Komarovsky, 1950, McKee and Sherrifs, 1959). These have also been found to affect personnel decisions regarding women (Joshi 1988).

There are certain attitudes and perceptions, which differentiate men and women as managers. This necessitates the fact to know the image of women managers held by the society and to examine through research study as to how much of it can be justified and on what grounds and how much is just not justified (Dipboye, 1975).

Gender and Work

Women and men work in different sectors and job areas and men occupy 85 to 90 percent of the positions at the top levels of working life. The concept of segregation implies that the division of labour is not based on 'natural' skills or on the 'free will' of individuals but that it needs explanation, especially because the segregation also result in inequalities, mainly that women are concentrated within low pay areas, whereas men's jobs are better paid and offer better promotion prospects. The division of labour into

‘female’ and ‘male’ work areas is broadly considered to be a vital element in the subordination of women.

Many explanations are available when we wish to understand the gendered division of labour historically and in the present day and the resulting inequalities between the sexes. We deal with and discuss explanations at different levels: the macro-level, the meso- and the individual (micro-) level (Alvesson & Billing, 1997).

Gender and Organizational Culture. In this section we will talk about the workplace relations from a cultural point of view. The cultural approach in organization studies proceeds from the assumption that the ideas, the definitions of reality and the meanings which are shared in common by a collective (a company, a work group, for example) are a central — perhaps even the central — feature of organizations. This approach draws attention to the question ‘How is organization accomplished and what does it mean to be organized?’ (Smircich, 1983, p.353). More or less integrated patterns of common ideas and meanings constitute the core of structures, which denote relative stability in an organization. They have their roots in, and are influenced by, various social and material practices. They do not persist unchanged, but are recreated and reinforced (and sometimes weakened or changed) in a multitude of different situations, in everyday language, in actions and in material structures and in a multifaceted network of symbols, meanings and significations (Alvesson and Berg, 1992; Frost et al., 1985, 1991; Martin, 1992; Smircich, 1983, etc.).

Culture is the framework that guides action and social relations, ‘the medium of life’ (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1991). It facilitates social life, but also includes elements of constraints and conservatism as it tends to freeze social reality: to subordinate people to dominating ideas, beliefs and taken-for-granted assumptions. Even though there are also cultural meanings and values in organizations that are pro-equality, in gender studies critical aspects of the gendered subtext of organizational life are often of the greatest interest (Alvesson and Billing, 1997, p. 105).

Gender can function as a perspective or as an inspiration for a set of metaphors for the

understanding of organizations (Billing and Alvesson, 1994; Gherardi, 1995). Gender dimensions can thus be observed also on a more abstract level than simply in relation to the concrete circumstances and relations of men and women. Gendering organizational culture theory thus provides an approach for an exploration of cultural meanings of physical objects, actions and verbal expressions loosely coupled to the specific mix of sexes — or even lack of a mix (in one-sex only contexts) — directly involved. All kinds of organizational structures and processes are seen as carriers of cultural meaning, drawing upon and producing gendered ideas, values and assumptions. This does not mean that everything is treated in terms of gender, but that everything is carefully *considered* in these terms before one finally decides if and how to treat subject matter. Business language and practices, such as corporate strategy, campaign, conquests of markets, raiders or take-overs, may, for example, be conceptualized in terms of dominating masculinities (Knights and Morgan, 1991), but the origin of, for example, strategy in the military is not in itself sufficient to say that all corporate strategy talk and practice express masculinity.

Organizational Culture and Women Managers. As a result of the subordinate status of women in management, and the devaluation of feminine values in the business environment, the first female executives to succeed in breaking through the glass ceiling into corporate management adhered too many of the rules of conduct, norms and standards that spelled success for their male counterparts. Because they were breaking new ground, these women did not have role models, and because there was a general lack of recognition of women's ways of leading, they also tended to lead like men in a command-and-control style of management. Indian experiences confirm that the first wave of women executives were under pressure to conform to and assimilate a dominant masculine corporate culture and to counteract the traditional stereotypes that men held of women. In so doing, they rejected some of their own feminine values and culture. Yet they dared not go too far in adopting male patterns of behaviour lest they pose a threat to the position of men. They were expected to be tough, though not macho; they had to be ambitious, but could not expect equal treatment in terms of pay, perks and promotion. Women dared not lose their femininity altogether, but their femininity was also not valued.

Very few companies have moved women into the executive ranks. What has prevented women's movement into management and, especially, into the executive suite?

The Present Study

Against this backdrop the issue worth investigating is to what extent the perception of social role influences the structural role of men and women managers in organizations.

Objectives and Hypotheses

The study intends to examine the prevailing culture in Southeast Asian organizations. The assumption (as mentioned earlier) is that the organizational culture is influenced by the social culture which further influences the behaviour of people in organizations. To add further, the impact of such socio-cultural factors does affect women's share in top managerial positions.

Therefore, the broad hypothesis is,

Social role perception will influence the structural role of men and women managers in organizations.

Measures

Method. The researcher used a multi-prong method:

- Secondary source data.
- Questionnaire and
- Informal interviews.

A host of factors were examined with the help of a structured schedule. To put them,

Culture, Social Role and Self-Concept. To understand the social role of men and women in a culture the respondents were provided open – ended items to express their views regarding:

What do you think about women’s role in our culture?

What is men’s role in our culture?

Women and Work. The next question that comes to mind is whether the allocation of work at the workplace is influenced by the sex differences. Therefore, the investigator tried to gather information pertaining to,

Do you take into consideration sex while allocating the work responsibility?

The investigator further asked,

How often women are considered for assignments which demand greater involvement and commitment?

The Perception of Women. The author became interested in understanding the image of women managers in organizations. Therefore, the respondents were asked to express their views on,

“what is your first reaction when a female joins the company in a managerial position?”

Organizational Culture. A 13-item scale was developed to measure the attitude of the respondents regarding the prevailing culture in the organization. The respondents were asked to judge each statement on a 4-point scale by choosing any one of the alternatives. The scores ranged from 1-4. The internal consistency of the items was found to be very high as the alpha coefficient was .81.

Supportive Relationship at Workplace: A six-item scale was used in the present

study to examine the superior -subordinate relationship at the work place. The respondents were asked the nature of support that they are likely to receive when they need and the chances of its availability. For illustrations,

(a) **How often you talk personal things to your superior?**

Quite often Sometimes Rarely Never

(b) **How often are they available?**

Rarely Sometimes Generally Quite Often

The responses were obtained on this four point scale which helped to get a score on each dimensions by multiplying the score of (a* b). The six dimensions were:

- (i) Support for personal problem,
- (ii) Support for job related problems,
- (iii) Support for family related problems,
- (iv) Support in need and
- (v) Openness in relationship.

The respondents were further asked,

Whom do you consider to be a good mentor? Please provide reasons for it:

- (a) A Male Manager
- (b) A Female Manager

The scores ranged from 1-4. The alpha co-efficient was reported to be .70.

Success and Men and Women Managers

(a) **Personality and success.** It is generally assumed that success goes with men.

People believe that it is necessary to be aggressive in order to be successful. These are some of the common assumptions that people have. Therefore, the investigator asked the respondents,

Do you think it is necessary to be aggressive in order to be successful?

(b) **Criterion for being effective.** The respondents were further asked with the help of an open – ended item regarding the criterion for being effective in one's role as a manager, separately, in the case of male and female managers.

Competence and Male and Female Managers

The author was further interested in examining the prevalence of perceived glass ceiling, therefore the respondents were asked to express their views on,

Do you feel women managers are less competent than their male counterparts?

Women and Assertiveness

This was examined with the help of a couple of items.

First of all, attempts were made to examine whether there are female member in the Board of Directors.

Are there any female members in your Board of Directors?

Yes / No

Further, the respondents were asked,

How do you perceive her behaviour to be:

(a) Assertive

(b) Neutral or

(c) Non-assertive

The author became further interested in understanding whether the women managers influenced the decision taken by the Board. Therefore the respondents were asked,

Would you please share one instance when you felt that you influenced the decision taken by the board?

Background Variables. A list of eighteen items was used to gather the background information of the respondents. The items were related with age, sex, marital status, educational background, father's occupation, position in the organization, length of service, number of companies worked, number of promotions received, size of the company, present salary, past salary etc. etc.

Sample

Hundred twenty-nine male and seventy-one female managers working in South – East Asian Countries (India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Korea) participated in the study. Out of which 32 respondents were from Srilanka, 20 from Nepal, 20 from Bangladesh, 15 from Korea and the majority 113 were from India. Convenient sampling was used to collect the data. The average age of the male respondents were 39.94 and of female respondents 38.12 years. More than 80 percent in both the samples reported to be married. Both the categories of respondents seemed to have the educational qualifications of graduation and post-graduation.

The family background of the respondents revealed that the majority comes from service class (72.9 % in the case of male respondents and 64.5% in the case of female respondents). Further, the findings indicated that in the case of male respondents 2.3 percent reported their father's occupation to be agriculture and 15.5 percent told it to be business against 1.3 percent and 25.0 percent reported by female respondents respectively. A small number of respondents (9.3 percent in the case of male managers and 9.2 percent in the case

of female managers) did not respond to it. The distribution of respondents in the case of male sample seemed to be: (1) Senior Managers (38.8%), (2) Middle Managers (54.2%) and (3) Junior Managers (7.0). In the case of female sample it was as (1) Senior Managers (23.7%) (2) Middle Managers (60.5%) and (3) Junior Managers (15.8%). The majority in both the cases seemed to belong to large organizations (74.4% in the case of male respondents and 71.0% in the case of female respondents).

The male respondents seemed to draw on average a salary of Rs. 20840.75 per month and female respondents a salary of Rs.29769.63 per month. The respondents in the case of male sample were found to have 15.63 years of service with on average 2.81 promotions and in the female sample it seemed to be 10.80 and 2.49 respectively.

Setting For the Research

The multi-national, national and private houses operating in India, Bangla Desh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Korea provided the setting for the present research. A wide range of organizations belonging to manufacturing, work and service organizations constituted the settings for the research.

Procedure

The purpose of the study was to understand the socio-cultural determinants of the low representation of women in Asian organizations therefore an effort was made to get the responses from a wide variety of organizations ranging from IT Consultancy Firms, Financial Consultancy Firms, Banking to hard core manufacturing organizations. Our interest was not to examine the organizational differences but to have a holistic understanding of the research issue.

The questionnaires were mailed to the contact persons in Bangla Desh, Nepal, Korea and Srilanka. They took the responsibility to mail back the filled in questionnaires. To collect the data from Indian organizations the author prepared first a list of the organizations, which

she wanted to include in her sample. Next, the Managing Director of the companies was approached to seek the permission. The data were collected from June 2000-January 2001.

Results

Masculinity, Femininity and Work

Culture and Sex Role Perception. Sex role perception plays an important role in shaping the behaviour of the individuals, which is likely to have spill over in to organizational behaviour. The respondents were asked to express their views regarding women's and men's role in the culture of the society. The obtained responses were content analyzed and reported in Table 1.

Table 1

Culture and Sex Role Perception by Men and Women Managers

Role Perception	Percentage of Responses	
	Male Respondents (N= 129)	Female Respondents (N = 71)
<u>Role of Women</u>		
1. Dual Role	25.85	37.98
2. Educate and nourish the children	35.37	33.54
3. Educate the new generation with cultural heritage	38.78	28.48
<u>Role of Men</u>		
1. Bread winner	39.88	46.15
2. Authoritative	44.17	39.11
3. Develop the country	15.95	14.74

Table 1 revealed that the male managers perceived the role of women to be to educate the new generation with cultural heritage and educate and nourish the children. Dual role of women received comparatively low attention of the male respondents. On the contrary, female managers perceived dual role most. Educate the new generation with cultural heritage received comparatively low attention than that of educate and nourish the children. Further, the role of men was perceived to be authoritative which clearly shows the prevalence of power –distance in our society. The Asian societies are patriarchal, and therefore, men's role is perceived that of breadwinner (to earn for the family), authoritative (dominating) in nature and are responsible for the economic role to develop the country and not society which falls within the duty of women.

The Perception of Women

The respondents were asked to express their views on, **“what is your first reaction when a female joins the company in a managerial position?”** The obtained views were content analysed. The findings indicated that 45.84 per cent of the respondents felt that when a female joins the company in a managerial position, the first reaction is to know about her personal life. Only 25 per cent of the respondents were of the opinion that she is perceived as an administrator. A good number 29.16 percent of the respondents expressed the feelings of appreciation for a female manager as she joins the company in a managerial position. The overall findings indicated a mixture of responses as a reaction to when a female joins the company in a managerial position. However, the most dominant reaction seemed to know about her past and family life.

Women and Work Allocation

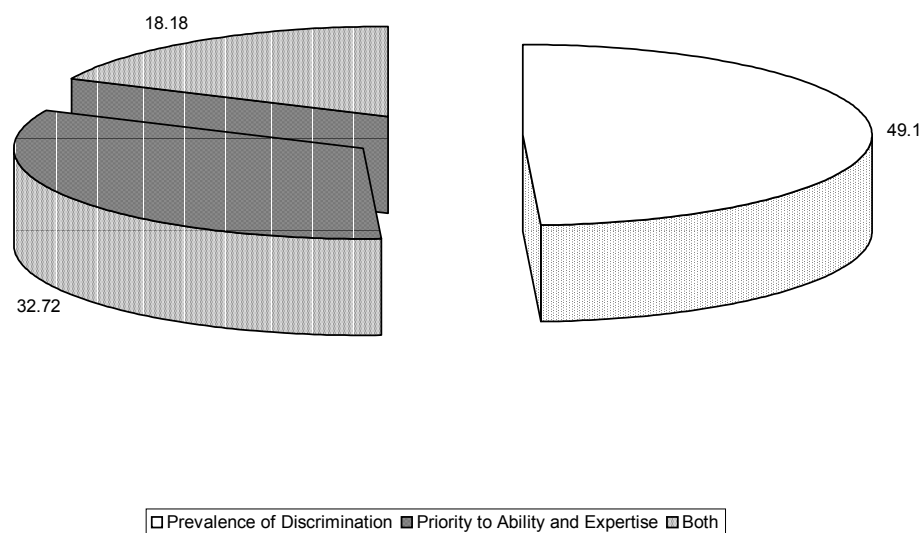
The next question that comes to mind is whether the allocation of work at the workplace is influenced by the sex differences. Therefore, the investigator tried to gather information pertaining to,

Do you take into consideration sex while allocating the work responsibility?

The respondents were asked to narrate one or two instances. The content analyses of the incidences indicated that 49.10 percent of the managers who participated in the study perceived the prevalence of discrimination in allocating the work responsibility with respect to outside jobs. 32.72% of the managers were found to hold the opinion that while allocating the work responsibility the priority is given to ability and expertise. A small number of managers (18.18%) reported both to be true – discrimination as well as expertise, while allocating work responsibility. One can vividly see the results in Figure 1.

Sex Discrimination in Work Allocation

Figure 1



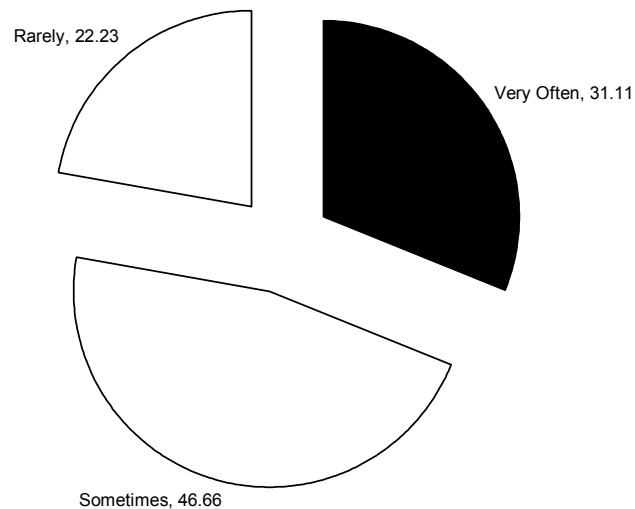
The investigator further asked,

**How often women are considered for assignments
which demand greater involvement and commitment?**

The obtained responses were content analysed and graphically portrayed in Figure 2.

Women Considered for Greater Involvement Task Assignments

Figure 2



The results (as depicted in Figure 2) showed that 46.66 percent of the respondents said that sometimes women are considered for assignments, which demand greater involvement and commitment. 22.23 per cent of the respondents hold the view to be very rarely as against 31.11 per cent who reported it to be very often.

Perception of Organizational Culture. A thirteen –item scale was used to examine the perception of organizational culture by male and female managers. The factor analyses provided two factors:

1. Men Favoured Organizational Culture (Eigen Value = 3.50; Pct. of Variance Explained = 26.93) and
2. Work Motivation (Eigen Value = 2.45; Pct. of Variance Explained = 18.87).

Keeping in view the theme of the present paper it is pertinent to discuss only the perception of men favoured organizational culture by male and female managers. The obtained mean scores are graphically displayed in Figure 3.

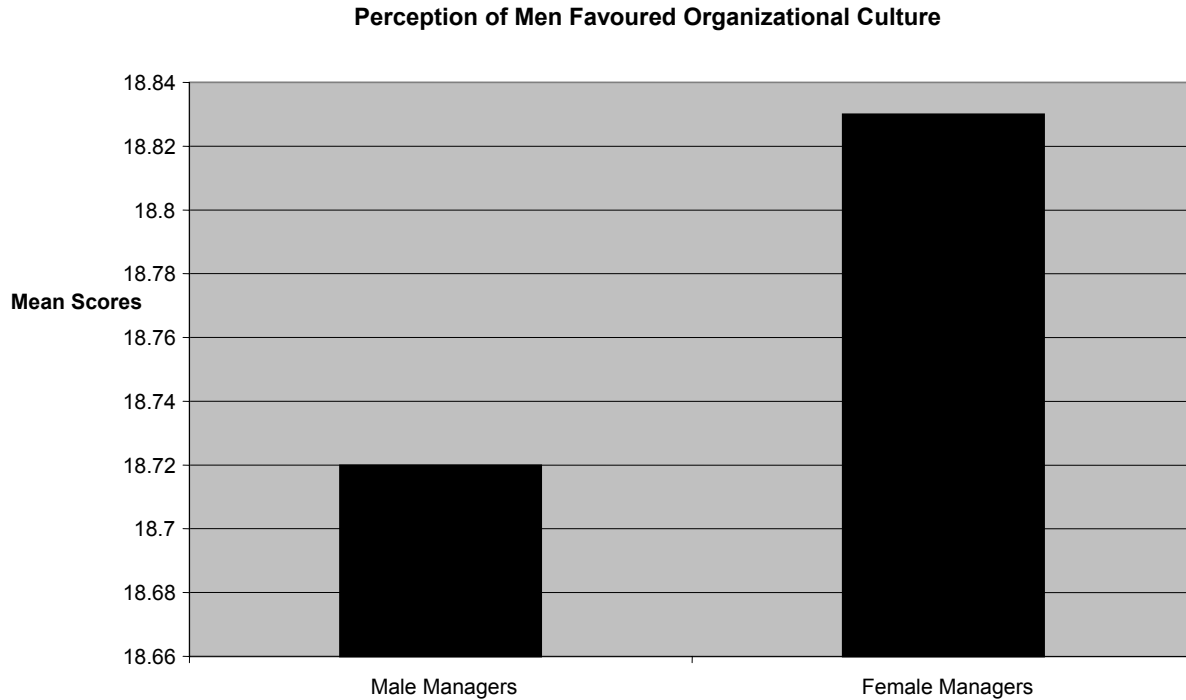


Figure 3

Figure 3 showed that as compared to male managers female managers perceived the organizational climate to be tilted towards men folk. The difference in the opinion (as reported by ANOVA) was found to be highly significant ($p < .0001$ level).

Supportive Relationship at Workplace

The prevalence of supportive relationship at workplace was examined. The study focussed on five major areas of support, i.e., support for personal problems, support for job related problems, support for family related problems, and support in need and openness in relationship. The score on each dimension was calculated by multiplying the score indicating one's effort to seek the support by the availability of the support system. The mean and SD scores were computed and presented in Table 2.

Table 2**Mean and SD Scores Pertaining to the Availability of Supportive Relationship at Workplace**

Dimensions	Male Managers (N = 129)		Female Managers (N = 71)	
	Mean Scores	SD Scores	Mean Scores	SD Scores
1. Support for personal problems	7.27	3.41	6.80	3.64
2. Support for job related problems	10.21	3.37	9.78	3.63
3. Support for family related problems	8.52	4.52	8.73	3.85
4. Support in need	10.03	4.43	9.77	4.83
5. Openness in relationship	9.56	5.67	8.91	4.66

Table 2 disclosed that both the levels of respondents perceived the availability of supportive relationship at workplace mostly when they felt the need and when they had job related problems. In both these cases male managers perceived the supportive relationship to be more as compared to the female managers. Women managers sought more support for family related problems than that of her male counter parts, whereas, male managers sought support for personal problems more than that of his female counterparts – women seemed to be a bit hesitant which may be one of the reasons why the male managers perceived openness in relationship to be more as compared to his female counterparts.

There seemed to be an agreement in the views of male and female managers that participated in study ($p > .05$ level).

A Good Mentor: Male or Female Manager

After examining the supportive relationship at workplace the author became interested in knowing the views of the respondents as who do they consider being a good mentor: male or female. The obtained percentage of responses are put in Table 3.

Table 3

Valid Percentage of Responses Related To The Item Who Is A Good Mentor

Categories	Male Respondents (N = 129)	Female Respondents (N = 71)
1. Male Mangers	46.49	36.76
2. Female Managers	18.42	20.58
3. Both	35.09	42.64

Table 3 showed that both the level of respondents perceived male managers to be a good mentor. Interestingly, a good number of respondents in both the categories expressed it to be both, particularly those reported by female managers.

Success and Men and Women Managers

Attempts were made to understand the dimension of success in male and female managers.

(a) **Personality and success.** It is generally assumed that success goes with men.

People believe that it is necessary to be aggressive in order to be successful. These are some of the common assumptions that people have. Therefore, the investigator asked the respondents,

Do you think it is necessary to be aggressive in order to be successful?

The obtained responses were content analysed in terms of 'yes' and 'no'. The results disclosed that the majority believed that it is necessary to be aggressive in order to be successful (58.63%). Only 41.37 percent of the respondents negated the statement.

(b) **Criterion for being effective**. The respondents were further asked about the criterion for being effective in one's role as a manager, separately, in the case of male and female managers. The obtained percentage of responses after doing content analyses are graphically displayed in Figures 4 & 5.

(i) **In the Case of Male Managers**

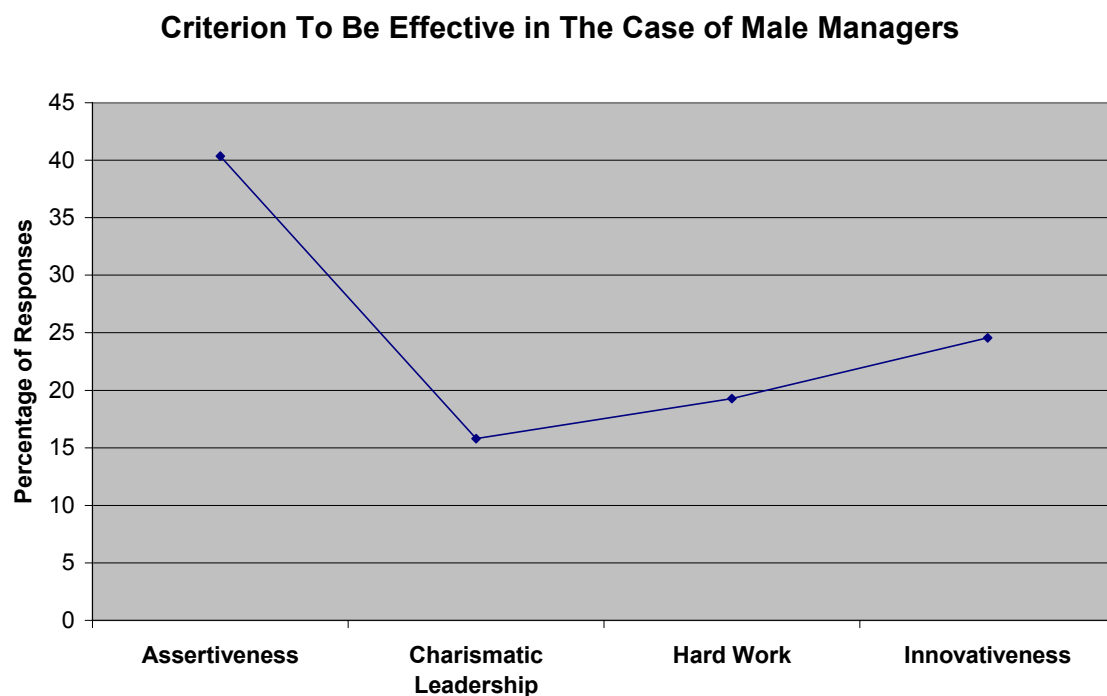


Figure 4

Figure 4 suggested that the respondents perceived assertiveness to be the most preferred criterion for being effective in one's role as a manager. Innovativeness was reported to be the next important criterion.

(ii) In The Case of Female Managers.

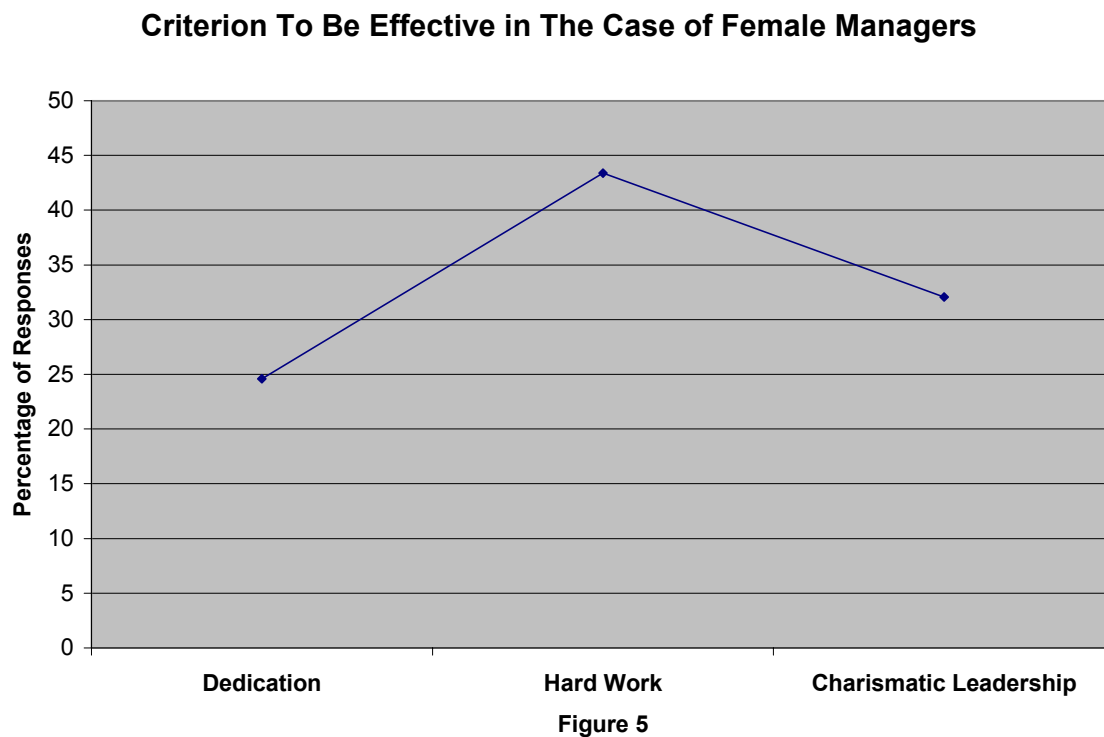


Figure 5 indicated hard work to be most important criterion in the case of female manager in order to be effective in her role. Next criterion seemed to be charismatic leadership.

This clearly indicated the skewed perception of the respondents with respect to male and female managers in order to be effective in one's role.

Competence and male and Female Managers

The author was interested in examining whether female managers are perceived to be less competent as compared to male managers. The findings are displayed in Figure 6.

Are Women Managers Less Competent Than Their Male Counterparts

Figure 6

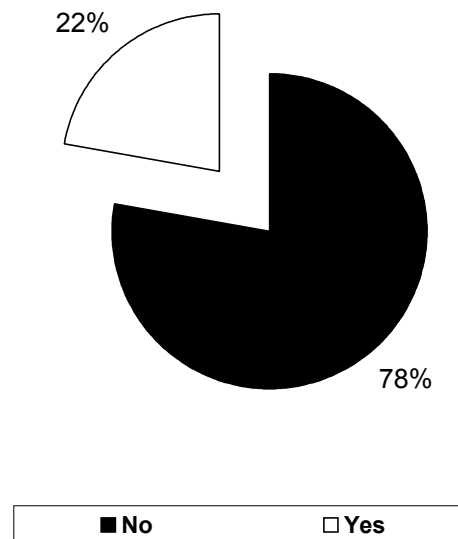


Figure 6 highlighted that the majority (77.78 percent) of the respondents reported that women managers are not perceived as less competent.

Women and Assertiveness

As mentioned earlier, this was examined with the help of a couple of items. First of all, attempts were made to examine whether there are female member in the Board of Directors. The obtained responses suggested that 67.3% of the respondents reported that there are no women in the Board of Directors against 29.3 percent of them who agreed to the presence of female member in the Board. A smaller percentage (3.4 per cent) did not respond to the item.

The respondents were further asked,

How do you perceive her behaviour to be:**(c) Assertive****(d) Neutral or****(e) Non-assertive**

The findings showed that a good number of respondents (48.3%) did not respond to this. 34.5 per cent of the respondents perceived the behaviour of women managers in the Board of Directors to be assertive against 1.7 per cent of them who reported it to be non-assertive. 15.5 per cent of the respondents reported it to be neutral.

The author became further interested in understanding whether the women managers influenced the decision taken by the Board. 58.63 per cent of the respondents perceived it in an affirmative way. However, 41.37 per cent of the respondents felt it in a negative way.

Discussion

The overall results clearly reflected the perception of patriarchal society in the responses of the respondents. The results provided support to the fact that Asian Organizations are hierarchically structured (Singh-Sengupta, 2001). The society provides a superior position to male members and the secondary position to female members. The role of men was perceived as breadwinner and that of women as to look after the family. Further, in Asian societies men are perceived to be assertive and commanding whereas women are expected to comply, obey and be submissive and docile.

There seemed to be a spill over of socio-cultural values on organizational culture as it was perceived to be tilted towards male folk of the organization. There were clear evidences of social role dominating the structural role in the organizations, i.e., in terms of criteria to be effective, perception of possible good mentor etc. The respondents' perception itself revealed the prevalence of stereotyped attitude in organizational settings. Interestingly, the majority reported that women managers are not less competent than her men counterparts. However,

the prevailing gender biases seemed to lead to sex discrimination in allocation of work, particularly, the assignments that demand greater involvement and commitment.

Hence, the traditional social role still seems to be operative in the organizational context that is manifested in the communication style of male and female managers (i.e, the male freely communicating and female being a bit hesitant). The men managers seemed to perceive the superior –subordinate relationship to be more open and supportive as compared to the women managers that participated in the study.

Conclusion

Both the top men and women in major corporations believe that companies, as well as women, have a responsibility to address women's needs in an evolving managerial workforce. There is a need for profound cultural change within the organization. Providing a female manager with a "stretch" assignment essential for her development may mean putting her in charge of a function or a factory or an international operation that has never before reported to a woman. To address this challenge, some companies have launched formal programmes to identify and develop high potential managerial talent – usually not exclusively for women, but with women well – represented among programme participants.

One effective way to foster diversity in senior management is to incorporate diversity into the succession planning process, by ensuring that the executive feeder pool includes women.

Strategies to Promote Women into Management

Regulatory mechanisms and legal frameworks are necessary to eliminate discrimination on the grounds of sex. Affirmative actions and guidelines should be implemented to genuinely change attitudes while taking existing diversities into account. Enterprises, institutions and governments should take appropriate steps to ensure that

employees are aware of obligations and rights stemming from fundamental rights, equal employment laws, where applicable, and related legal requirements.

Recruitment and promotion procedures and criteria should be transparent and based objectively, on competence and merit, and not result in discrimination in practice. For this, it is essential that clearly defined job descriptions are established free of gender bias and that there is an objective system of job evaluation and a well-structured management performance appraisal system. It is good for enterprises, institutions, organizations and governments to set targets and goals and to monitor progress.

Women should be given opportunities for strategic assignments and job rotation to improve their promotion prospects to high echelons of management and breaking the glass ceiling. Upward mobility and career progression should be more flexible to allow women more opportunities based on their ability and competence. Career and succession planning and the tracking of women in enterprises and organizations help them gain visibility and experience, as well as provide a mechanism for monitoring their progress. Adopting objective policies of internal recruitment combined with the necessary job and coping skills training can give more opportunities to women to advance in their career.

Positive action and equal opportunities policies play an important role in leveling the playing field and ensuring equal opportunities and treatment for women in recruitment and promotion. These policies and actions help women bridge the gender gap through the provision of special training or assistance with family care needs. For those aspiring to management jobs, equal access to assertiveness and leadership training, as well as the development of decision-making skills are especially relevant. Life-long learning and on-the-job training should be accessible to women and men on the same terms. The qualifications, diplomas and level of education of women should be valued in the same way as men's. Given the tension between the demands of family/private life and work at certain periods over the life cycle, ways need to be devised to enable not only women, but men too, to build a career and raise a family. This can include more flexible working hours, reduced hours of work and adequate child- and elder-care facilities and arrangements. A good balance between

managerial and family/private life responsibilities not only benefits the health of the individual, the family and therefore society, but may well contribute to more creative and efficient management styles and better business decisions and results.

Ensuring women's equal access to networks both formal and informal, not only in the enterprise but beyond, can provide support and visibility, and as well be a source of invaluable information. Mentoring women, not only by other women, but also by men, could provide advice and assistance in coping skills, as well as in business strategies, leadership, public speaking, assertiveness and team building skills. The benefits to the enterprise of a mentoring programme include increased job satisfaction, efficiency, creativity and reduced staff turnover. The employee gains confidence and self-knowledge, understands better her role and the corporate culture and has the opportunity to express how she and others think and feel about company practices. Mentoring also helps a future manager define career goals and increase professional skills.

Diversity management conceived as a response to specific needs, career aspirations, contributions and lifestyles of the workforce, can be an important strategy to promote women to the top and may be good for business. As this is a new and evolving concept, however, further consideration should be given to this new managerial approach, taking into account the cultural and social context and implications. When analyzing the subject of diversity management and equal employment opportunities approaches, the focus should be on the actual results with regard to women breaking through the glass ceiling.

Commitment of top executives to gender equality, making middle managers aware and accountable, and adopting a range of measures are central in ensuring the success of equal opportunities policies at the enterprise level. Recognition of best practice through awards at the national level can be important incentives to enterprises in promoting women. The appointment of corporate officers in the personnel departments of enterprises, who are responsible for the monitoring and promotion of equal opportunities throughout the enterprise, is an important means of sending a message throughout a company or organization and of making managers at all levels accountable for promoting women.

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