

Sex-role stereotypes and the women administrators

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Abstract

Unlike grandmothers, most women currently in administrative roles were reared with social message has brought many exciting opportunities many women have found that the unpredictable challenges can out weight the opportunity. This is particularly true if one is the first women' or the only women' in a particularly role therefore, it becomes essential that women in administration be active mentors to other in our community this paper try to explain the sex – role stereo types and women administrators.

KeyWords: Organizational, Judgment, Administrators, Overqualified, Perceptions, unpredictable challenges, Opportunities, evidence

Introduction

With an increase in women's education and aspiration women are venturing out of traditional women-dominated occupations like teaching, nursing, medicine etc. to more male dominated occupations in the corporate sector, mainly executive roles. Industries which have had women Administrators in the past like banking and insurance are recruiting more women in the managerial positions and many industries and organisations which have had only male employees for long are throwing their doors open to talented young women. Even though they have moved to other functions in the corporate sector, they still form less than 2 percent out of the total 12 percent of the women work force in India.

In country after country, the production of women holding managerial positions falls short of men. Corporations, it seems, have systematically ignored women as a potential resource. In all countries the higher the rank within the organization, the fewer the women found there (Adler and Izaeli, 1988). In some countries, the percentages though small, have increased over the last decade; but in none have they approached equality. The pattern prevails in oriental and occidental cultures; in communist, socialist and capitalist systems, and both economically developed and developing countries. The question is "Why?" Why are so few women in management and why do their numbers remain so small? The paucity of women in management appears neither coincidental nor random. There is no systematic evidence indicating ineffectiveness of women as administrators. In entry and middle level management positions, which sizable number of women now hold in some countries, experience confirms their effectiveness? In upper level management, the scarcity of women to data precludes judgement for or against their effectiveness. If proven ineffectiveness is not the reason, why then are there so few female administrators worldwide? This can be explained as a consequence of the sex-role stereo-types about women who are widely shared within our culture. The term "sex - role stereotype" refers to the belief that a set of traits and abilities is more likely to be found among one sex than the other. "Sex - roles" refer to two different things first, to different personality trait which are supposedly consistent with biological sex, second to different adult social

responsibilities. It is often assumed that males and females take on different social responsibilities because they have different personality traits women become wives and mothers and men become family breadwinners because they each have personality traits that fit them for these different social relationships (Pleck, 1971). Such stereotypes promote sex discrimination because being based upon assumptions about women as a group, inferences are made about an individual's attributes and by and large, these stereotyped attitudes are antithetical to those presumed behaviours necessary for success at traditional male jobs. For instance, aggressiveness, persistence and forcefulness are thought to be essential for success at jobs conceived of as "male" and none of these attributes is thought to characterize women. This inconsistency between perceptions of job requirements and group-based perceptions of women's work - related attributes often endorses the hypothesis that women will be poorly equipped for such jobs and will fail to successfully handle them.

Jeneltee Webb (1991) points out that jobs themselves are tendered. Studies reveal that the stereotype of notion regarding women that they lack in the abilities and personality traits required of administrators is widely held and has contributed much to the lack of progress in this area of employment. While, on the one hand, the number of women entering organizations is increasing, on the other we find that women are still largely underrepresented in recognised leadership positions and to tend to occupy the lower paid, less creative and lower status posts. The structure of management hierarchies in organisations has been seen as a reflection of the power structure in society which is dominated by men (Kruss and Wintermantal, 1986). One possible explanation for the differential treatment of men and women lie in the prevalent notion of sex-role stereotyping which assumes that managerial roles and responsibilities are the domain of men and women by virtue of their gender, lack the skills and attributes necessary for good leadership. The sextupling of management as a male occupation requiring male traits, poses a major barrier to women who would otherwise qualify and excel in position of leadership. Much of the stereotyping is based on myths. To be specific, at least five stereotypes (cited

below) commonly presented as arguments against women in management, appear to be fallacious.

Stereotypes against Women Administrators

i) Men are intellectually Superior

One common stereotype holds that men are more intelligent and in general, more competent than women. However, research comparing men and women and a variety of aptitudes does not support the supposed intellectual superiority of men. On the contrary, the most consistent finding has been that women surpass men in tests of verbal aptitude. Furthermore, women tend to excel in tests of memory and in scholastic achievement. (Anastari, 1958). Although women are not handicapped intellectually, the stereotype of the ideal woman discourages expression of abilities (Hollander, 1972). Within organisations, many basically intelligent women unfortunately act "empty-headed" in order to fulfil the expectation of male superiors. The woman with enough intellectual talent to be a manager is often torn between the desire for approval by male authorities (for whom she must play the role of the naive, uninformed person) and the need for an outright demonstration of competence (for which she risks ridicule by acting "out-of-role").

ii) Men are emotionally more stable than Women

Another common belief is that women are more vulnerable to drastic swings of mood than men. Again, research does not support such a general conclusion. One reason for this stereotype of feminine instability may be that traditionally a woman's expression of emotions of fear, anxiety, grief, disappointment or pain has been more socially acceptable than it has been for men. But male role requires a man to appear tough, objective, striving, achieving, unsentimental and emotionally unexpressive. If a man is tender, if he weeps, if he shows weakness, he is likely to be viewed as unmanly by others, and he will probably regard himself as inferior to other men (Jourard, 1975). Since women may express a greater variety of emotion than men without fear of disapproval it may be thought incorrectly that they are temperamentally unstable. However, the same range of emotions exists in men even though they are less likely to be expressed.

iii) Men Value Achievement, Promotion and Meaningful Work More than Women

Women have long been described as being interested in what Herzberg has termed the hygiene factors, i.e. money, security, clean working conditions, social relations and other extrinsic factors of work. In comparison, men who aspire to be Administrators are believed to value intrinsic motivators such as the desire to achieve, to be promoted, to assume responsibility and to perform work which utilizes important abilities. Because of alleged differences in motivation, women are thought less committed to work itself.

Several studies dispute the notion that women are less intrinsically motivated. In a survey of male and female employees, both men and women rated the intrinsic factors of their work as more important than the extrinsic factors. There were no differences between the sexes in the expressed importance of the intrinsic factors (Saleh and Laljee, 1969).

A national survey of employed men and women, found that women were as dissatisfied as men with work which failed to utilize their abilities. In the same survey, no difference was

found between men and women in terms of the value placed on social relations (Crowley, Levitlin and Quina, 1973). Considerable evidence points out that women are as committed to their jobs as men.

Sometimes women Administrators are found to have refused promotion in order to avoid transfer. They do not prefer to stay far away from their family as they are very much concerned about their husband's profession, children's studies and other family responsibilities. But women who face possible promotion equalled men in their desire for advancement.

iv) Men are inherently more assertive than Women

Very often men are described as being innately more assertive than women, who are purported to be passive and docile by nature. Research and observation indicate that women can assimilate the roles requiring assertion of influence and leadership as effectively as men.

Jerolyn Lyle and Jare Ross (1979) compared the leadership styles of 70 male and 70 female Administrators matched on occupational level, tenure and other relevant characteristics. Contrary to the stereotypes, most of the women adopted active, effective leadership styles and were actually more diverse in their management styles than the men.

Of course, women Administrators face certain problems which do not exist for the typical male. A woman attempting to exert leadership in a male environment may be on the "horns of a dilemma". Since a successful manager is deemed to be assertive and self-reliant, a failure to fulfil this role would cause her subordinates and peers to perceive her as weak and passive, more capable of being led than leading. But if she demonstrates assertiveness, initiative or ambition, many men and women will see her as hostile, maladjusted and overcontrolling. Too often "leadership" qualities for a man are judged as traits of hostility and aggression in a woman.

v) The Successful Manager possesses Masculine Attributes

Underlying the belief that women are less qualified than men for managerial positions is the assumption that the successful manager possesses most of the traits valued in men, such as assertiveness, emotional stability and ambition, but few of the traits valued in women, such as dependence, passivity and emotionality (Dipboye, 1975). This assumption is oversimplified in view of the psychological research on leadership. Characteristic of a good leader usually depends on the situation. The most important quality of a good leader may be the ability to change his or her style of management according to the situation. Unfortunately, some Administrators lack flexibility because they rigidly adhere to the stereotype of the good leader as a tough, unemotional and dominant individual.

Factors Responsible For Sex-Role Stereotypes

Three types of factors have been held responsible by different writers for influencing the early development of females and males: biological, environmental and cognitive. No agreement has been reached as to which has the greater influence, but all three factors appear to have at least some effect. To understand these effects, we need to consider the basic assumption of each theory.

i) Biological Factor

Those who focus on the effects of biological factors argue that

the characteristics and behaviours that children display are determined mostly by their biological sex. According to this argument, boys behave the way they do simply because they are male and girls behave as they do because they are female.

ii) Environmental Factor

Those who focus on the effects of environmental factors argue that girls and boys are induced to act in accordance with sex roles by being rewarded for engaging in the "right" behaviours and punished for engaging in the "wrong" behaviours by adults and other children. According to this theory, parents play a large role in shaping their children's behaviour but other people, institutions and the society at large can have a considerable effect as well. Both of these theories depict the role of the individual child in his or her own development as essentially passive. In the biological view, the child's biological sex determines the nature of development. In the environmental view, the reinforcement patterns specified by others determine the nature of development.

iii) Cognitive Factor

The cognitive theory of development assumes a more active infant or child one who participates in is influenced by and in turn influences the forces that contribute to his or her development. Although these forces are similar to the reinforcing influences suggested by the environmental theory, they are more subject to modification according to the cognitive theory. Some sex differences in characteristics and behaviour emerge very early in life — as early as 12 weeks of age. This does not mean, however, that the differences are necessarily biological in origin, because differences in parental behaviour towards male and female children are observed at an equally early age. Beliefs about what activities are appropriate for girls and boys emerge at a later age. So children are not born with knowledge about gender stereotypes but learn about them as they grow older (Berndt & Heller, 1986). The "heredity versus environment" question is far from settled. Instead, while recognising that heredity has at least some influence on the behavioural development of children, we shall focus on the interactions with external forces suggested by both the environmental and the cognitive theories. Although these two theories differ considerably in their basic assumptions, they agree on the predominant influence of culturally determined gendered stereotypes. Some of the important people and institutions that contribute to the adoption of sex-typed characteristics and behaviour by girls and boys are: Parents, School and The Mass Media.

Parents

Parents certainly have a special effect on childhood development. Parents' value affects the way they raise their children. For example, parents' who claim that opportunities for both sexes should be equal in the adult world are more likely to encourage their children to deviate from gender stereotypes, than parents who advocate separate roles for women and men (Antill, 1987). Parents influence their children's behaviour by providing differential reinforcements; they base their behaviour toward a child according to their conception of what a child of a given sex is likely to be like. Gender stereotypes lead parents to reward boys for being aggressive, competitive, and independent, while girls are rewarded for being compliant, nurturant, and gentle. Thus

parents' expectations are likely to be self-fulfilling prophecies.

School

Once they enter the school systems, children are subjected to the influence of authority figures in addition to their parents. They have more adult models from which to choose, and they have more occasion to be rewarded or punished for their own behaviour. One of the first messages they receive at school is the sex-typing of positions on the school system itself. Men typically run the system, whereas women work in it. Men hold the majority of administrative jobs, such as superintendent and principal, and women are concentrated in teaching positions, especially in the earlier grades. School activities are segregated by sex, such as home economic for girls and woodworking for girls; ring ball for girls and foot ball for boys. These blatant forms of sex-typing have been reduced sharply in recent years. The subtler forms of socialization pressures, however, remain. These originate from the attitudes and behaviours of the teachers themselves.

The Mass Media

The mass media, particularly television, influence childhood development by providing opportunities for modeling and information seeking outside family and school. Stereotypical behaviour by females and males characterizes both children's and adult's programing, as well commercials. Not surprisingly, both children and adults who watch more television tend to be more aware of gender stereotypes, see themselves in more stereotypical terms, and hold more traditional attitudes towards men's and women's roles.

Magazine advertising has conveyed similar messages. Until recently, ads rarely showed women in working roles and never showed them as executives or professionals. Several stereotypes of women's roles occurred regularly: (a) Women's place in the home; (b) Women as not making important decisions; (c) Women as dependent and in need of men's protection; and (d) men regarding women as sex objects, not as people. Women most often are portrayed as happy and diligent homemakers, beautiful and dependent social companion, or most concerned with being blend thin or having other physical characteristics they did not possess (Sexton and Haberman, 1974). Television has made some attempts to adjust to the reality of women in the workplace, but not without difficulty.

Consequences of Sex Role Stereotypes

Despite contradictory evidence, stereotypes concerning female inadequacy as Administrators persist and act to distort perceptions of male and female performance and potential.

1. One obvious consequence of these ideas is that a man is more likely to be selected for a managerial position than is equally qualified woman. The preconceived notion that women are suited only for certain kinds of jobs reinforce the employee's view. Many organisations do not recruit women at all, though it may not be explicitly stated in their policies.
2. At the time of job allocation women Administrators are not given challenging and risky jobs. There are certain reservations. Good assignments like foreign visits, touring, projects and trade job are often on the side of their male counterparts. In administration there is a tendency to treat some districts as "women's districts" and

some departments like social welfare, education and health as "women's depts.". This labelling of posts in the administrative services.

3. Sex role stereotypes results in exclusion of women from policy formulation and decision making, non-involvement of women in crucial organisational issues, hesitation in giving credit for good work if done by women and exclusion of women from informal networks. The exclusion of women from such important spheres relegates them to peripheral, supportive activities (Bhatnagar and Nair, 1988). By clinging on to stereotypic beliefs about women such as "women do not want to travel and women prefer secure, low risk jobs which may be true for some women but can not be generalized to include all women, organisations under utilize the potential of women Administrators.
4. Once a woman is selected for a managerial position, her superiors are less committed to her career development than they are to the career of a man in her position. They do not get as many promotions as men do and do not climb the corporate ladder as far as men.
5. Not only can sex role stereotypes act to prevent the selection and development of female managerial talent, but they can distort performance evaluation. Women Administrators experience a sexist bias in their evaluation for annual appraisal and promotion purposes.
6. Though women have entered various jobs and professions, they are not yet regarded as sincere professional workers. If she works under a male boss there is a tendency of her being regarded first as a woman and then as a worker. Men have through generations dominated the woman and therefore they feel humiliated in being ordered around by a woman superior. Working with male colleagues also produces tensions. If she is reserved and does not mix with them she is regarded as a snob and suffers from isolation. If on the other hand she is friendly and nice she is labelled as a flirt.
7. Majority of women Administrators are expected to carryout all the household work. Husbands in general do not participate in any of the household duties. The outcome of the situation is that a woman's paid work gets affected and puts her at a disadvantage as compared to men. She does not want to be transferred because of her family and as a result she compromises with her career. Many women give up very promising careers for marriage or later for the children.
8. Very often female Administrators face a conflict between job demand and family obligations. Given such a conflict, the male employee always puts his job above his family, but a woman in the same situation is expected to sacrifice her career.

The ultimate consequence of sex role stereotypes is that they may become self-fulfilling. Ultimately, many women believe themselves less capable of managing their men and have become resigned to jobs for which they are overqualified. Too many capable women give up or avoid career aspirations either to behave consistently with a manipulated concept of self (gender oriented) or to adjust to a society shaped and dominated by men. Although women are not handicapped intellectually, the stereotype of the ideal women discourages expression of abilities. Within an organisation many basically intelligent women unfortunately act empty-handed in order to

fulfil the expectations of male superiors.

The process of 'sex role stereotype' is a cultural trap (Cooper and Davidson, 1982) in which women are ill-prepared for organisational life and men are relatively ill-prepared to accept them. Male domination of the organisational world in the form of ownership and control, positions of status and authority and in cultural values and hegemony has served to restrict the entry of women into the managerial positions. Social and legal forces will eventually bring a more equitable representation of women in management. But, if integration of women into the economic and social development of the country is to be truly achieved, it will be necessary firstly to effect a change in the social attitudes in regard to women in general and employment related issues in particular.

Rather than resisting the inevitable, today's Administrators can act to ease the process of transition. A first step in this direction would be the reexamination of stereotypes, which distort perception and treatment of women. Most important, Administrators should be sensitive to the female managerial talents among their employees and should make concerted efforts to encourage and develop this talent.

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