GENDER DIVERSITY & ITS MANAGEMENT

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Abstract

This article examines the impact of gender in the workplace. The impact of gender on the composition of the management team is analyzed and current trends of women in management are reviewed. Changes in the workplace over the last three decades as the number of women in the workplace has increased are explained including the emergence of the family-friendly workplace. The types of benefits offered by family-friendly companies are reviewed. Employment statistics on women in the workplace, the occupations in which women work, and the salary differentials between women and men are presented.

Keywords: Baby Boomers; Family Friendly Workplace; Generation-X Women; Labor Shortage; Women at Work; Work-family Conflict; Workforce; Working Woman

Overview

Gender presents at least two primary challenges to organization managers. One is the impact of gender on management staffing and the composition of the management team. This has most often been discussed in terms of women moving into management positions which has been, and still is in parts of the world, positions traditionally held by men. The second area of impact is in human resource management, which has changed how management deals with a mixed gender non-management **workforce** who is now often split rather evenly between men and women.

Women in Management

As the society and the economy changes many companies have had to reexamine their workforce composition and their hiring practices. One shift that has been significant is that more companies have become interested in recruiting and promoting women into senior management positions. This provides women the opportunity to work their way to the executive levels of many corporations. Women are succeeding in a wide variety of positions and industries traditionally considered inappropriate for women. They are also beginning to succeed in areas that have historically been male-dominated including manufacturing, engineering, and financial services.

Companies are seeking women for senior management roles for several reasons. One of the most significant reasons is that women represent a very large untapped pool of talent. This is especially true for senior level positions. Companies that desire to strengthen management teams want to remain competitive in a rapidly changing marketplace. They recognize that by

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including women in the upper echelons of management can add new sources of talent and expand the perspectives of the management force.

The expanded perspective of the management team is achieved because of inherent differences between men and women. Many organizations now believe that women bring alternative perspectives to the table. The ultimate goal of course, is to gain and sustain a competitive advantage for the company. As the management team becomes more diverse the customers and clients of the company tend to view the **diversity** as positive. It should also be noted that women do account for about 80% of all consumer spending in the United States. Women now routinely buy cars and invest in stocks. They also make the majority of the family buying decisions. This being the case, the input of women at the executive level of a company becomes more valuable as well.

When women are on the management team, it signals to current and potential employees that the organization is changing with the times and is embracing gender **diversity**. Furthermore, the presence of women on the management team can expand the perceptions of the market place and helps to ensure that existing as well as new business opportunities are not overlooked. This is logical in that women constitute a large and rapidly growing consumer base. Organizations with a relatively high percentage of women executives have come to understand and capitalize on gender differences in leadership style and management behavior. These companies are also considered more likely to address actual and perceived inequalities in the workplace and have accomplished that in part by not leaving gender **diversity** to chance ("Gender and organizational performance," 2002).

Overcoming Obstacles to Female Advancement

Even though the composition of the management work force is changing there still are some issues that impede the progress of women. One major obstacle for women working at senior executive levels is how to overcome the inherent difficulties of balancing career and family. Many things in society have changed, but it is clear that women remain the primary caregivers in most societies and probably will continue that role. It is also likely that women who become senior managers will also be raising a family and may even be caring for their aging parents.

Many companies recognize the dual social role of women and there have been many programs implemented to accommodate their needs such as flextime schedules and generous maternity leave packages. Women know, however, that utilizing many of these opportunities can stifle or even derail a career. To improve their return on investment for making these opportunities available, many companies have limited their generosity only to women who have proven track records of success within the company. There is also a pattern in recruiting executive women from outside which shows recruiters and managers alike do not actively consider female candidates that are likely to make use of these programs.

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Many corporate CEOs are white, male, and 60 years of age. Some of these men still find it difficult to picture women like their wives and daughters in senior-level positions. There could be many reasons for this, even including a lack of confidence in their wives and daughters. In some industries, competition is heavy and business is not always neat and clean. The aging CEO may feel that women cannot play aggressively enough to win the market. Thus, many older CEOs let the bias of their personal experiences guide the recruiting process. Many of these CEOs had mothers who stayed at home, and many still have wives who stay at home and attend to family and social matters.

Another not so subtle discrimination in the executive corps is that male executives may exclude women managers from informal activities outside the office. These activities tend to strengthen business relationships. Season tickets to sporting events, for example, may not be offered to female vice presidents. This discrimination results in women losing important opportunities to build relationships outside the structure of the office environment (Landon, 1996).

At lower management levels, women are typically placed in non-strategic sectors, in personnel and administrative positions, rather than in professional and line management jobs leading to the top. Thus, women are cut off from networks (both formal and informal) essential for advancement within enterprises. Unfortunately in some large companies and organizations women in high-level managerial positions such as human resources and administration are often considered less vital to the organization. This may be because managers tend to work long hours in order to gain recognition and even gain promotions ("Women in management," 1998).

Forces that may be underlying explanations of women's inequality in the workplace are the result of structural barriers, stereotypical assumptions, individual choice, and work-family conflict. These issues are broad, power-implicated, ideological forces (Gazso, 2004). The "think manager-think male" attitude still dominates many organizations. Research shows that managerial and executive-level positions are still male sex-typed. Many executives perceive that women do not fit in these positions as well as men. Thus one conclusion that the research supports is that women are considered to be less effective managers than men (Bergeron, Block &Echtenkamp, 2006).

Programs for Advancement

Many governments, enterprises, and organizations, through policy as well as practice, have committed to programs to advance women. Some of these programs have met with limited success while others may have gained a higher profile. Generally, they are having a positive effect, especially in influencing younger generations of men and women.

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The development of detailed training, promotion, and career plans in organizations has been shown to be an impetus for promoting equal opportunities in career progression. This may require specific support through networks, coaching, or mentoring. In addition, these must be continued even during downsizing, decentralization, and delayering. ("Women in management," 1998).

Analyzing the Workforce Participation of Women

The workplace faces several challenges in the new millennium, among them that employers face a fairly serious labor shortage. There will not be enough younger people to fill jobs left vacant by retiring baby boomers. Current estimates on the labor shortage in the United States range from three million to ten million workers by 2010.

The demographics of the American **workforce** have also changed in the last 40 years. More women are in the **workforce** than ever before and now comprise about 60 percent of workers. In addition, almost three-quarters of mothers with children under age 18 are now in the **workforce** and an equal percentage of households have two incomes with both adults holding jobs. The age of the **workforce** is also increasing with the number of workers over age doubling by 2012 (Clark & Reed, 2004).

The modern working woman generally enters into the **workforce** after completing her education, and moves in and out of the **workforce** several times until retirement. About three fourths of women work in administrative support or as executives, administrators, and managers. Women are obtaining the majority of bachelor's degrees and are now receiving a high percentage of medical, law, and MBA degrees.

There are about 36 million "Generation X" women in the United States and over 15 million are mothers, according to the 2000 Census Bureau. The Gen-X woman has achieved the greatest one-generation leap in social and gender equality in American history. They have been the first to enter the legal, medical, and business professions in large numbers and percentages. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2006), Gen-X women now comprise just over 50 percent of all workers in executive, administrative, and managerial occupations. This is over 25 percent higher than it was for that age group in 1983. Gen-X women work longer hours than their elders did and are seeking graduate degrees, pushing hard for their futures. They have encouraged employers to offer flexible working arrangements, including flextime, compressed schedules, telecommuting, and job sharing among other benefits (Piscione, 2004).

Issues

Establishing the Family Friendly Workplace

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The management challenge of dealing with a mixed gender non-management **workforce**, often spilt evenly between men and women, has attracted considerable attention during the last decade. This challenge is not just to deal with increased numbers of women in the workplace but to also address the needs of men who are married to women who have jobs and families; or, the dual-income household which now totals 33.4 million families.

Much of the human resource development efforts over the last decade have focused on women. Currently the age of working women spans multiple generations. They may be married. They may be single. They may or may not have children. The array of potential characteristics is important because it means that there is not a one-size fits all recruitment strategy or benefits package that will meet the needs of all working women. Women of baby boomer age now face the challenges of eldercare more so than of child care. Some, however, take on the care of their grandchildren if their children are divorced or live in two-income households. When companies or nonprofit organizations target women recruits they need to bear in mind that of women's family responsibilities may reach far beyond their own household.

Single mothers can have difficulties in keeping home and work balanced. For instance if there is a problem with a child at school a single mother will need to attend to the problem unless they have support from grandparents or nannies. However, many single mothers would still prefer to be at a child's doctor appointment or a parent-teacher conference. This means that they need a flexible work schedule so they can take time off from work for these important appointments.

Many single mothers do not have the support of parents or family and will need to take time off work as needed to address domestic issues. This may jeopardize their career advancement or even the stability of their jobs. Still, the middle-class single mother is basically far better off than her predecessors of previous generations (Piscione, 2004).

As business conditions changed and competition stiffened one of the easy ways for a company to expand their market share was through a merger or acquisition. The ever changing landscape of leadership that this created, along with post acquisition or merger lay-offs, substantially altered the employee loyalty that many companies spent decades building. Women may have borne the brunt of many of these changes. The need for corporate family-friendly benefits and non-traditional employment approaches has suffered through the corporate consolidations of the last two decades. In attempts to avoid high turnover rates, which in turn cause an increase in hiring and training costs, employers needed to devise new strategies to recruit and retain quality employees.

Benefits of a Family-Friendly Workplace
The term "family-friendly" encompasses a wide range of workplace benefits and practices that help to support the well-being of an employee and his or her family. This includes

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benefits designed to help reduced life's stress and contribute to a sense of comfort and security. Such benefits often include options that enable employees to have more control of their lives. They could include flexibility in working hours or providing assistance with financial issues. The benefits that an employer gains by establishing a family friendly workplace include:

- Being known for practices that contribute to the support family needs which actually produce real economic results, such as higher profits, higher productivity, and lower attrition.
- Establishing a strong correlation between a company's culture of family support that is recognized among employees, and with customers that are looking to do business with socially responsible companies, and in the communities in which the company has facilities.
- An image of corporate social responsibility that can attract potential investors and new customers.
- An increase in the quality of life and job satisfaction of employees as well as upper management.

Benefits Offered

Since the turn of the century, the most common family-friendly benefits that employers have rolled out are related to dependent care spending accounts, job-sharing, child care, flexible work schedules and compensatory time off. Other benefits include liberal family leave options that go beyond the legal requirements for such leave. There has also been an increase in part-time telecommuting working arrangements and compressed workweeks which allow employees to work forty hours in less than five days.

Many organizations are becoming creative about the types of benefits they include in their family-friendly benefit portfolios. These may include wellness programs, employee assistance programs and home buying assistance. There have also been several education related benefits thrown into the mix, such as scholarship programs for children of employees and tuition reimbursement programs. Community building benefits have included volunteer release time and even concierge services (Clark & Reed, 2004).

Worker's Unions & Women

Another way that a workplace can be transformed or be made more worker-friendly is through unionization of workers. Women are becoming union members at a faster rate that men. This means that unions need to focus on issues that concern women if they choose to capitalize on the trend of more women joining. This could benefit the unions as well as women who join because the women need benefits and representation and the unions need to

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stem the tide of declining memberships. It may take some unions a while to shift their emphasis because many unions have been traditionally male dominated.

In terms of benefits, unions could win more women members if they would think more like the corporations that have shifted their benefit packages to appeal to and serve women better than they have in the past. Unions may need to have more women as organizers and as leaders in order to convince potential women members that the unions are actually changing and shifting their emphasis. Some unions may be able to make the shift while others may need to wait for a new generation of leadership.

Unions may also need to shift their organization targets and start forming more union cells in places where women traditionally work. If the union offers a good package of benefits to women they may very well succeed in organizing in places that they have failed to organize in the past. It may take decades for this to happen but it is possible to see a resurgence in unions if they can appeal to the growing number of women in the workforce (Yates, 2006).

Conclusions

Organizations face several challenges in dealing with gender in the workplace. In basic terms, men and women are different in their perceptions of work, success, and life in general. Both men and women want to rise within their organization and to make more money. While they share this similarity there are others issues and goals that are completely different for men and women.

Women have far greater social pressure than men to be both successful in their careers and to be mothers and daughters. The mother role is fairly clear and it is demanding both physically and emotionally. Many women are also daughters and in current times this means that they are often cast into the role of primary care taker for their parents as they age. Although the role of men in the family setting has certainly changed over the last few decades, men still have less of this pressure in their roles of father and son.

Given that women are both increasing their presence in the work place and their power in the consumer market, organizations need to come embrace women on both fronts. First they must provide a workplace and benefits package that is appropriate to meet the needs of working women and their roles as mothers and daughters. Secondly, companies need to address how they position themselves as a producer, seller, or service provider to women as consumers. To do this they need to understand the marketplace and how women view their products and services. It is not likely that men will be able to accomplish that without the help of women in management positions.

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