

Chapter 8

Progression Aspirations and Leadership

ABSTRACT

This chapter aims to: discuss prominent barriers to women's career progression and development; demonstrate how senior women face a double bind, in that they need to adopt masculine traits in order to succeed in management and leadership roles, but are viewed negatively for behaving in masculine and therefore unfeminine ways; debate that view of management as masculine as persisting, in societies and organisations; explore how women are disadvantaged in the workforce; and discuss how gendered occupational segregation perpetuates.

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we will discuss career progression, career barriers, women in leadership and the characteristics of a good leader. Men may have disproportionate advantages in terms of career progression (Singh and Vinnicombe, 2004; Dick and Nadin, 2006; Bebbington, 2002). The boardrooms of most top UK and American companies are dominated by men with little change over the last few years. Singh and Vinnicombe, (2004) argue that senior women do not easily gain access to the boardroom, where an elite group of male directors maintain their power. Singh and Vinnicombe (2004) used the term 'elite' to denote those who had reached corporate director level,

specifically on the FTSE 100 company boards. It has been suggested that supportive organizational practices for women show wide ranging positive outcomes. Women describing more supportive organizational practices also indicated more job and career satisfaction; higher levels of psychological well-being and increased organizational identity and commitment (Ng and Burke, 2005). Others commentators (Mattis, 2005; Giscombe, 2005; Hammond, 2002) while not explicitly studying psychological well-being have also reported favorable job and career consequences of supporting women's career advancement. Therefore, organizational practices, which positively support women and increase psychological health would seem to be a logical extension given the asso-

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ciation of positive employment experiences with psychological well-being (Burke, 2003; Nelson and Burke, 2002).

Simpson (1998), in a mixed methods study of the careers of male and female managers across public and private sector organizations, suggests that women's careers have always progressed in less orderly routes, characterized by changes in direction and organization and by career breaks. Simpson states further that their visibility and token status has meant that they have always faced additional pressures to perform and their career paths have often been characterized by uncertainty. Dreher (2003), studied 72 US corporations for sex ratios and work life balance practices and concluded that firms with the most generous benefits (flexitime, job-sharing, telecommuting, elder care and adoption benefits, and dependent childcare options), tended to be those a greater number of women in senior management positions. Dreher suggests using social contact theory that increase in proportionate size of minority groups promotes more contact with members of the majority, reducing stress and performance pressure experienced by minority group members. Furthermore, as the minority increase in numbers they can work to promote change in HR (Human Resource) practices.

Oakley (2000) has described some of the barriers to women's progression to boardrooms and the position of Chief Executive Officer (CEO, the person with the most important position in a company) in the USA, which clearly has relevance in the UK. Organizational barriers can include informal and hidden senior promotion processes (Alimo-Metcalfe, 1995), as well as a lack of appropriate career development (Ragins, Townsend, and Mattis, 1998) and lower pay for women (Oakley, 2000). Other explanations include the gender stereotyping of leadership (Schein and Mueller, 1992) and gendered communication styles (Tannen, 1994). Corporate culture, power dynamics, the 'old boys' networks and social exclusion (Ragins and Sundstrom, 1989), as well

as elements of tokenism (Kanter, 1977), are also thought to contribute. Research suggests that these barriers exist in the USA and across many Western countries, particularly in male dominated organizations; for example in Portugal (Carvalho and Cabral-Cardoso, 2002, in Singh and Vinnicombe, 2005); in Sweden (Wahl, 1992, in Singh and Vinnicombe, 2004) and in Norway (Kvande and Rasmussen, 1991, in Singh and Vinnicombe, 2004). A similar situation is also evident in Australia (Kjeldal, Rindfleish, and Sheridan, 2005). While many of these barriers may in some cases be unintentional, and subtle they are undoubtedly forms of discrimination. For example, it appears that women in the academic sector are disadvantaged in career opportunities compared to men. The international literature, including US, Australia and the UK supports this notion. There is a paucity of women at professorial level in science, engineering and technological subject areas. Doherty and Manfredi (2006) explored the career routes and advancement procedures for both academic and support staff in four UK universities and the extent to which these might constitute barriers to progression. Data collection involved 26 interviews with senior people involved in decision-making about promotions. They reported a general view across almost all the interviews that women were reluctant to put themselves forward for promotion and that they were likely to undervalue their achievements. By comparison, the men were seen as more confident about their abilities and more likely to promote themselves confidently. Using the Carnegie Foundation International Survey of the Academic Profession, Bain and Cummings (2000), examined survey data from 10 countries (Australia, Brazil, Chile, Germany, Israel, Japan, Korea, Mexico, UK and US), accumulating 16,074 responses. Bain and Cummings noted that in societies where women tend to rise to high positions in government and business, women are more likely to obtain the rank of professor. Thomas and Davies (2002) interviewed 53 women academics in three UK

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