MEN AND WOMEN MANAGERS: CAN THE GENDER DIFFERENCES BE - BY- PASSED?

Dr. Twinkle Prusty
Associate Professor, Faculty of Commerce
BHU, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, India

I. Introduction

Gender is a social construct imposed upon biological sex, which is emerged through socialization and educational processes and continuously reinforced by the social norms in the evolutionary path of the human being. At this present period, the belief in gender differences has resulted from the traditional male dominance factor being over-emphasized and over-developed with strong force. But, it has gone too far and need to be balanced by its opposite and complementary female energy. Negative energy is so overwhelming in our society that it’s easy to think that the gendered equalities as per the employment legislation wouldn’t make any difference. In other words, despite almost 30 years of equality in legislation, women are discouraged in the management participation, functionally segregated in justifying their professional skills and are paid less than their male counterparts. The ideological thoughts that regard the advancement of equal opportunities in the society by encountering the socio-economic and physical barriers still count only 1% of the top managers as women, since entrepreneurship has always been equated with the masculinity. Hence to dispel the myth that sustain inequity of opportunity and inequality of gender, action to by-pass them can be likened to the movement of a pendulum, which when allowed to swing uninterrupted by any limitation will eventually find the centre between the two opposites as a whole. To initiate this process of equality and opening up of the global economy for the inclusion of women's participation in the work force, the increased gender parity in the work force today is called for, with a by-pass surgery.

II. Issues of Gender Role Bias

The organizational theory remains gender bias as the focal stream of management thought, research and development is based on male-oriented perspectives. However, the subject related to gender relations is not paid any attention and an acknowledgement of women, even if making up half of the work force is strangely ignored in the organizational theory. No doubt, the women's participation in the management has increased over the past few decades; their contributions are being evaluated less favorably than men in status, promotions and managerial decisions. Moreover, in the social and cultural cognitive areas of the organizational settings, men's flaws and weaknesses are interpreted as strengths in development decisions or even ignored, while those committed by women executives are highlighted and strongly criticized or excluded. Similarly, researches were conducted by three major theorists namely Abraham Maslow, Frederick Herzberg and David Mc Cleland on motivation which gave varied results however based on male's perception, behavior and force only, while ignored to explore the meaning that the women have assigned to motivation. On the other hand researches which tested both men and women couldn't recognize the fact that motivation cannot be visualized on the same grounds due to several commitments attached to the women's life. Apart from the motivational theories, research studies were also made to understand the leadership approaches and styles preferred by both men and women managers. The difference in the gender roles and identities could be visualized in the personality of the individuals which is characterized by stereotypes enacted in them due to biological difference. Hence, the issues in gender inequalities cannot be by-passed so long as women are positioned as the "other" and male power is centered in the whole corporate culture which really perceive them to be different and unequal.

III. Perceptions of Men and Women Managers

The perceptions of the behavior of men and women managers in the workplace are automatically established through gendered construction which is being similar and equal in styles and competencies but still different in attitudes. Gendered attributes are highly visible and continuing as the salient aspect of social organizational life. However, the question of gender differences is not only related to social construction but it is also a natural product of biological difference. Researchers have found that women are more flexible and multitask-oriented while men retain their power and advantage by command and control. Hence, in terms of motivation and
leadership styles in the organization structure, gender differences are increasingly playing out in the way both men and women managers acknowledge their gender role development. Typically, the consensus approach of women in managing the affairs of an organization contains an element of desire to build relationships, willingness to explore opportunities, to handle matters with extra tolerance, to encourage optimistic actions, to respond in emergencies, to allow openness and freedom and finally to perceive things in a more rational manner with full control over emotions. It has been observed that women managers outperform men managers in communication and interpersonal skills which are at the edge of their style in building the best team of management by a transformational leadership approach. On the other hand, men's one-dimensional sense of doing things make themselves identify with transactional leadership style and lead to form "navigational relationships" in the organizational life. Hence, the men managers perceive the matters typically in the opposite manner than the women do in the workplace either by overlooking or misinterpreting them. However as per the common belief, gender differences in personality is based on an ongoing process and purpose rather than with "nature" as because men and women have learned to 'do gender' which has been inherent as gender identities. The male dominance substance remains largely unquestioned with prominent expression of power and advantage while the women style of management is always recognized as weak and non-functional with powerlessness and submissions. No doubt, very few women have achieved higher managerial positions in the corporates important ranks and another few running fortune 500 companies; they have demonstrated higher levels of professional skills which are getting broadened by their cumulative years of experience in managing and operating businesses in significantly different ways than men do. Thus, the women of 21st century are entering higher level management positions in the workforce whereas the traditional hierarchical structure associated with the male predominant management ranks find difficult and inadequate in accommodating such a blend of masculine and feminine behaviors.

IV. Women Representations on Corporate Boards

No doubt, women on corporate boards have impact on the reputation of a company with their strategic management of issues which improves the constructiveness of board processes and deliberations. The inclusion of women on boards has added advantage in the form of benchmarking and best governing practices across the companies and the industries. Starting from early nineties, the concern about Corporate governance has taken a vital shape in regard to the issues of transparency, accountability, equity, integrity, probity, responsibility and sustainability which are of not only 'corporate excellence' but also 'professional excellence'. Thus the essence of any system of good corporate governance is in the effectiveness of board of director's performance which has fallen short of expectations on a number of counts by many great corporate leaders. These concerns over the issue of corporate governance and the failure of directors to exercise independent judgment have been raised for the past 20 years and hence it is unlikely that any dramatic change will ever take place any time soon with the existing system of having male members exclusively on boards. But it is likely that having more qualified women directors would reduce the existence of any kind of crises or failure. Research on women on corporate boards, their recruitment and selection processes and their experiences have continued to serve a valuable purpose and this must be continued if the gender differences are at all to be bypassed. However, the role and influence of women board directors have been difficult to be accessed in comparison with men's roles and contributions in the board. The fact that when demand for knowledge and skills are raised, apparently more opportunities would be opened up for those women who are qualified thus would be benefited by the ongoing changes in the governance process. As globalization moves from localization so also the debate on by-passing the gender differences are ongoing by studying the issues for the effectiveness of the board of directors and the question of having representations of women on boards is considered analyzing its impact on absolute terms. It cannot be ignored that the participation and contribution of women as board of directors shall have impact on the board culture and environment which is being different from the roles and behaviors of male directors in the present times. However, much faith cannot be relied upon the notion that the numbers of women directors will increase over time, but the increasing demand for qualitative and efficient governance process shall require more qualified women for using their variety of strategies in exerting influence including knowledge, information and relationships. This shall ensure the fulfillment of objectives of good corporate governance and enhance the value of the firm which is possible only with the sound functioning of the Board.

V. The Impact of Gender on Family Liabilities

The combination of gender and managerial status is found to be related to the work and family liabilities. The pressures of family and work domains are incompatible and thus the effect of gender can be felt on the type of role and obligations attached with the performance. Women managers, although experience higher levels of work and family liabilities as compared to the men managers, but then have more developed strategies in dealing with the conflicts associated with work and family roles than their male counterparts. Moreover, they
have the capacity to accept such level of conflict to certain extent which they do not notice and report it as much as their opposite groups. Organizations have their own expectations, biases and perceptions of both male and female managers. To advance in the career and profession, women face obstacles increasingly as they tend to deviate from the male norm of complete availability to the organization and can never be on an equal footing. This is on account of variety of reasons associated with balancing work and family demands which is visualized through less career commitment, less predictability, and a lowered ability to meet organizational demands. Hence, the only option possible is to choose a career in those organizations that are known to be family-friendly which offers the necessary flexibility at particular points in women’s career to assist their juggling of work and family care.

The women’s need to balance work and family is a barrier to career progression while most of their male counterparts do not accept the obstacles to gender equality in the work place. The destructive effects of gender inequality on work-family liabilities prevent men from maturing and developing the qualities necessary to meet the changing environment of the organization thereby restricting their own growth. As long as women are blocked from equal participation and attain their higher possibilities in work and family, an optimum environment for progress cannot sustain to create value addition to the organization or the economy. Even though, the levels of work and family pressures may be unexpectedly similar between women and men managers but they are mainly manifested in health problems, high stress levels with work overload problems which report higher levels for women managers. Thus research study suggests that women are naturally more affected by family demands and pressures than the men and therefore, the effects of gender on parental status and the marital status can be foretold by a number of career and work as well as psychological well-being outcomes among the mass of managerial and professional women2. These outcomes may be the result of time-based conflict, strain-based conflict or behavior-based conflict of multiple roles for both men and women managers.

VI. Final analysis for a by-pass surgery of gender differences

According to the relationship counselor John Gray, difficulties in relationships between a man and woman lie in the lack of understanding and acceptance of the differences between the two sexes10. As depicted by Dr. Gray in his famous book "Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus", the gender differences are inherent in the basic attitudes of men and women created naturally and hence, acknowledging and accepting the gender behavior is essential to human progress and the transformation of society11. However, on grounds, moral biological or social inequality if justified it shall retard the advancement of women and the progress of civilization. In all fields of organizational life, the systematic oppression of women inclusion in the corporate management or on board has been the conspicuous and tragic facts of history preventing them to realize their true potential. Thus, the damaging effects of gender prejudice are a fault line beneath the foundation of the organizational culture and life. The gains from the contribution of professional women often remains unexamined and unrecognized because a woman’s attempt to improve the men’s culture and decision-making process cannot be withstand or tolerated. Now, the elements necessary to unify people and nations are manifested in bringing about equality of the sexes and to improve the relationships between men and women. This effort to overcome the history of gender inequality requires unshakable consciousness that opportunity oppressed to women shall inevitably result in massive failures gradually, in the functioning of the organization structure. It is therefore desirable that the full and equal participation of women in all spheres of life is essential to social and economic development and prosperity of the country as well as the nation. No doubt, the differences in function between men and women professionals shall exist but to proclaim equality shall mean to affirm the complementary gender roles at home and society as well.

Without fundamental changes in the attitudes and values of individuals and in the underlying ethos of organizational climate, full equality between men and women managers are difficult to be achieved in reshaping the existing legal, economic and social arrangements. Just promoting the entry of greater numbers of women into higher levels of management is not a sufficient stepping in by-passing the gender differences. The long standing and deeply rooted condition of inequality must be eliminated. Hence a new age is needed to descend which will be an age of less masculine and more permeated with the feminine ideals and that age in which the masculine and feminine elements of civilization will be more evenly balanced ultimately, for by-passing the gender differences11.

References

[5]. Joanna L. Krotz, "Do women make better managers'? Microsoft small business kit:2003
[10]. Dr. John Gray, “Gender differences – Men are from Mars and Women are from Venus”.