

THE ART OF SEDUCTION IN LEARNING ORGANIZATIONS

Dr. D. AKELLA

Assistant Professor,

Indian Institute of Management Kozhikode

This paper deals with as to whether recent structural changes could have had an effect on the issue of gender in contemporary organizations. It discusses as to whether contemporary managers are making use of new forms of power and control to effectively manage their employees to meet external environmental demands and pressures in the form of recession and cut throat competition. The paper argues the need to undertake further empirical research to clarify and build the theory on learning organizations.

Keywords: gender, power and control, learning organizations.

INTRODUCTION

The present business environment has become highly complex, turbulent whether in social, political, economic, technological or ecological terms. "Economic liberalisation, global business opportunities, increasing competition, onslaught of technological innovations, and emergence of global communication networks have all impacted businesses in a large way" (Balasubramanian, 2001:1). Moreover customers have become more stringent and stakeholders more demanding. This has meant the demise of bureaucracy with its features of "hierarchical authority systems, top down communication, rules and regulations and managers who monitor and control" (Lank and Lank, 1995: 18). The answer now lies in the ability of organizations to learn, this has become an organization's sole competitive advantage (Stata, 1989). These organizations which are "able to learn, especially re-examine and restructure fundamental policies and values" (Argyris and Schon, 1983: 3) and "sustain consistent

internal innovation or “learning” with the immediate goals of improving quality, enhancing customer or supplier relationships or more effectively execute business strategy and the ultimate objective of sustaining profitability” (Mills and Friesen, 1992: 147), have been termed as learning organizations. These organizations are places “where people are continuously expanding their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured and where people are continuously learning how to learn together” (Senge, 1990: 1). In fact learning organizations with its emphasis on “continuously learning strategy and culture, flexible rewards and structures, participation decision making and open communication” (Author, forthcoming) have been described as “employees paradises” (Garvin, 1993).

So far, only issues pertaining to power and politics (Coopey, 1995; 1998; Dovey, 1997; Easterby-Smith et al., 1998; Author, forthcoming, Author, 2000) and managerial work (Author, 2001a) have been critically examined, this paper seeks to make a contribution by discussing the issue of gender in the context of management within learning organizations.

This paper has been divided into two sections. The first section will discuss male and female sexual traits and how management is denoted with a masculine image and identity. While the second section examines how learning organizations are adopting a softer, feministic style of management to seduce their employees into voluntary cooperation.

GENDER AND MANAGEMENT

According to Calas and Smircich (1992), before women entered the profession of management, management was gender neutral or rather there was “no gender in management” (1992: 229). In fact, it was with entrance of women in management that gender became an issue or problem when trying to explain traditional organizational and management theories. In other words, it is women who are gendered and cause gender problems in management theories i.e., gender = sex = women = problem (Calas and Smircich, 1992). Mills and Murgatryod (1991) suggest that within the world of work there are two basic gender rules: it’s a man’s world and it’s a man’s work. Moreover organizations were described in rational terms, and men were perceived as rational, therefore women were considered less worthy of organizational recognition and rewards (Gheradi, 1994). Marshall (1984) says that “women are traditionally excluded from management jobs because they are judged less serious, less motivated than male employees ... they are supposed to demonstrate low organizational commitment because they do not assign their jobs precedence over all other life areas, may leave to have children, and demonstrate less company loyalty than do male colleagues” and she further continues “the woman manager may be seen as a threat to organizational stability because of her apparent

lack of commitment ... women create uncertainty” (Marshall, 1984: 21-2). And the solution was to inform women subjects to masculinize themselves to fit into the mold or traditional patterns of management discourses. Gender was thus considered, basically to be a biological issue with certain physical and socially constructed traits. For instance women have been described as possessing some or all of these qualities “empathy, helpfulness, caring and nurturance, interpersonal sensitivity, attentiveness to and acceptance of others, responsiveness to their needs and motivations and orientation and cooperative relationships ... and an interest in actualizing values and relationships of great importance to community” (Fondas, 1997: 260). Femininity meant possessing characteristics like mutuality, cooperation and affiliation (Bernard, 1981), giving more emphasis to interpersonal skills (McGregor et. al., 2000) and being less keen on impression management (Singh and Vinnicombe, 2000). Women were associated with transformational leadership style which constituted employee participation, shared information, praising employee performance and a managerial style which worked at building a conciliatory approach thereby fostering mutual respect between labor and management.

In contrast men are “impersonal, self interested, efficient, hierarchical, tough minded and assertive, interested in taking charge and control and domination have a capacity to ignore personal, emotional considerations in order to succeed, follow objective codes of conduct and judgement and have leanings toward task accomplishment” (Fondas, 1997; Kanter, 1977) and follow impression management techniques (Singh and Vinnicombe, 2000). Also men were associated with masculine or transactional styles which embraced an approach based on competitiveness and power, where relations were reduced to commodities of exchange and transactions, used the techniques of rewarding effective performance and services rendered and punishing inadequate performance.

Now to consider, [man]-agement with its first syllable “man”, is seeped with masculine skills and behavioral traits. Kanter (1977), focussed attention on the connection between men and management, with her argument that Scientific Management, with its emphasis on rationality and efficiency lays stress on a tough-minded approach to problems, analytical abilities, planning and neutrality, domination, problem solving and task accomplishment. This forced women who were considered to be “too emotional” to step outside the realm of management unless they possess the ability to “think like a man”. In fact, woman have been relegated to supporting men’s managerial careers, as wives or secretaries (Grey, 1994). Further men are preferred to women because they are more committed, reliable, free from conflicting demands from home and thus more dependable (Kanter, 1977). Management therefore invoked the image of an authoritative, strong and impressive looking man – “white and male, with a certain shiny, clean cut look” (1977: 42).

Similarly managerial work has been described in masculine terms by the “founding fathers” of management thinking (Barnard, 1983; Fayol, 1949; Taylor, 1911) – planning, organizing, staffing, directing, coordinating, budgeting and reporting i.e., all rational and technical functions (Willmott, 1984). Managerial work was focussed on developing “systems of planning, mechanisms of coordination, methods of organization and techniques of control” (Mintzberg, 1991: 106), systems building, hierarchical level building, functional silos, surveillance techniques i.e., all masculine oriented work. Management simply stood globally for managing employees at work with the help of men. In other words, “think manager, think man” (Schein, 1976).

However, these images have been become obsolete, as companies now to survive against stiff competition have realized that transformative and participative styles are useful in generating learning climates. The feminine ideal with its traits of cooperation, collectivity and ability to form relationships as opposed to vertical hierarchical levels is more suited to contemporary organizational norms of management and leadership.

The next section discusses this softer style of management and how it meets the approval of learning organizations’ objectives.

THE ART OF SEDUCTION

Learning organizations have been described as employees’ paradises, good management practices, socialistic models and work place democracies. These organizations concentrate on generating work climates where it is possible for management and employees to reflect together, communicate openly, trust each other and become more creative and innovative. The new work of managers now is to create a meaningful vision, commitment to excellence and quality, developing creative and innovative climate, creating a learning environment in the organization, team building, empowering and developing the people within the organization (Panchalan, 2001). In other words management now to fulfill its functions, has to seek the support and co-operation and goodwill of its employees (Author, forthcoming). This requires a change in the managerial style and a move towards a new mode of managerial behavior – “persuasion over power, cooperation over competition and inclusion over exclusion” (Lee, 1994: 4). Basically it means a change in the manager’s orientation toward power and control, others’ needs and interests and maintaining relationships (Fondas, 1997). “Gone are the days of influencing the people with the conventional model of “command and control” (Panchalan, 2001: 1). Instead managers now need more insights and knowledge about their employees, working culture and the organization itself. Therefore the earlier concept of influencing people by centralizing power, exercising strict control over them and getting things done through threat of penalties has become redundant.

Now, a manager to undertake new work has to surrender control through delegation of authority and manage through empowerment. However a manager still exercises control, it is only in a more subtle and insidious fashion. As Bradford and Cohen (1984: 188-89) explain:

“the [manager’s new] role is no less influential than the heroic one, but it uses different means. Rather than exerting constant hands-on control to provide the specific answer [s/he] seeks to influence the group’s norms and the members’ expectation, to develop their skills, to prevent avoidance of the key issues and to see that analysis is rigorous, discussion thorough and standards kept high ... [The role requires the manager to focus on the needs of others, rather than on [oneself]...”.

Managers are required to give up control and undertake the roles of a guide, coach, nurturer and teacher (Fondas, 1997). Managers are replacing power equated with masculinity – “power over” people which makes use of strength, dominance, toughness and aggression (Fondas, 1997) with another type of power: “power to” give other sustenance, care for team, company and community and assume responsibility for them i.e., all feministic traits.

Managers now no longer command, direct and regulate others but instead support and develop others to exercise their skills and capabilities to the optimum capacity. This suggests a shift from the culture of “me-me-ism” (Champy, 1995) towards a “culture of willingness: helping others to do their work, better and better” (Champy, 1995: 177).

Managers now concentrate on building relationships and connections with a network of people like their subordinates, peer, superiors and external customer. “It is a matter of rearranging the quality of people’s attachments – to their work and to each other” (Champy, 1995: 77), with focus on “the way people connect to each other and to their work, a revolution in the significance of what they do and are” (Champy, 1995: 90). Managers tend to use behavioral characteristics like collaboration and cooperation to work with their subordinates to achieve the organization’s goals. The objective is to “find the best solution to achieve the goal, not into one person “winning” (Bradford and Cohen, 1984: 108-9). As Fisher explained managers:

“work more as a work process architect than as a work operation monitor. Thus the primary target of their work expands from tasks (or work) to relationships (things that affect how the work gets done), and from individuals (a smaller part of the work unit) to teams (a larger part of the work unit)” (1993: 121).

Management, thus in contemporary organizations has undergone a transformation. Fisher (1993: 117-8) brings out this change in these words:

“the traditional approach to management, for example, is a lot like sheep herding. It often puts the supervisor in the role of regulating, enforcing, or directing subordinates. Supervisors in this role concentrate on driving the subordinate flock in some predetermined direction. They monitor the work performance carefully and take appropriate corrective action when their flock veers off course. They become skilled in banking and heel nipping techniques, like performance reviews layoffs and more organizational censures...Shepherds, however, have more of a developmental responsibility than a directive one. They assume a position in front of the flock as a driver and director. They also spend considerably more time and energy analyzing the environment surrounding the sheep to anticipate dangers and opportunities than shepherders do...”

Management is thus showing a leaning towards democratic tendencies, people empowerment, concern and caring for its employees, all of which can be categorized as feministic and women's work. Managers now try to seduce their employees, with external shows of concern, warmth, helpfulness, persuade them into subjugation with schemes of empowerment and self management, beguile them through gentle and tender roles of teachers, nurturers and coaches.

The control aspect within learning organizations is now focussed on “creation of conditions such that the members of the organization can achieve their own goals best by directing their efforts towards the success above the needs and goals of the staff, integration would lead to recognition of both the organization and the individual's needs”. (McGregor, 1960: 49).

Here, the management seeks to achieve its own objectives under the pretence of personal commitment towards the employees. It is an indirect and a more complete form of control, where control was viewed by management in terms of the end it sought to achieve that is profitable production (Roberts, 1984). In fact, learning organizations can be compared with Management by Objectives (MBO) which is a core motivational technique which underpins job enrichment and behavioral modification. MBO operates by breaking down goal related behavior into simpler subroutines in a way that scientific management does with physical operation (Locke and Lathan, 1984). However, learning organizations take the concept of goal setting one stage further. Instead of setting goals monitored by senior managers to ensure compatibility with organizational objectives, individuals are required to set goals compatible with their own aspirations and needs (Brown, 1996). With emphasis given

to the intra-organizational construction of individual identity, managerial strategies which attempt to transform motivation and identity into influence and productivity are disguised (Miller and Verduin, 1979). Management thus effectively achieves the organization objectives with the support of its employees.

“We see here the dual role of the brainwasher, the aloofness corresponds to the threatener role, the friendless to the protector role. The authoritarian leader only playing the threatener role misses out on the friendliness vice versa with the laissez faire leader. It is the brainwashing, democratic leader who plays both the roles who is the most effective” (Lyn, 1966: 270).

The essence is to encompass the physical, social, emotional and mental abilities of the employees and insidiously control them to achieve the objectives of the organizations. For instance in my previous research on learning organizations, managers in my case studies adopt a caring, friendly oriented approach, they encouraged subordinates to discuss all their professional and personal and develop and maintain close and personal relationships with each other. This resulted in development of a family atmosphere which provided employees with emotional security and a sense of belonging. But it also exposed management to all types of emotional blackmail: “if you feel it is your company then only you can identify with it”. Managers now manipulate employees to volunteer to do more work as a means whereby they can prove their commitment and loyalty (Author, 2000). Thus managers control their employees by pretending to serve them and being concerned about their welfare.

This can be interpreted as a process whereby management in learning organizations uses all its feminine guiles to get the employees to do what s/he wants i.e., seduce them into willing slaves.

CONCLUSION

Yet, inspite of volumes of literature on feminization, learning organizations and new managerial work, what is lacking is absence of empirical work, to link up these three themes to answer questions like: has managerial work in learning organizations become feminine, if so what aspects are feministic and how do they contribute towards the overall organizational performance. How has feminization of work affected managers, especially woman managers, has it benefited them in anyway and if so how? The multiple case study approach with its elements of comparative framework analysis and the research technique of in-depth interviews would be an appropriate choice to examine the issue of gender within learning organizations.

REFERENCES:

- Author (forthcoming). *Unlearning the Fifth Discipline: Power, Politics and Control*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Author (2000). "The Learning Organization and its Impact on Traditional Views of Power and Control". British Academy of Management Conference Proceedings, Edinburgh, United Kingdom.
- Author (2001a). "Rethinking Management: New Perspectives and Directions". Paper presented at the IFMR Conference, Chennai, India.
- Author (2001b). "Learning or Controlling? Unraveling the Myth of Learning Organizations.
- Argyris, C. and Schon, D. (1983). Editorial, *Journal of Management Studies*, 21 (1), 3-5.
- Ballasubramaniam, S. (2001). "The Changing Role of Management Professor". Paper presented at the IFMR Conference, Chennai, India.
- Barnard, C. (1983). *The Functions of the Executive*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bernard, J. (1981). *The Female World*. New York, Free Press.
- Bradford, D., L. & Cohen, A., R. (1984). *Managing for Excellence*. New York, Wiley.
- Brown, D. (1996). "The Essences of the Fifth Discipline: Where does Senge stand to view the World", *Systems Research*, 13 (2), 91-107.
- Calas, M., B. and Smircich, L. (1992). "Rewriting Gender into Organizational Theorizing: Directions from Feministic Perspectives", in M. Reed and M. Hughes (1992). *Rethinking Organization*. London, Sage Publications.
- Champy, J. (1995). *Reengineering Management: The Mandate for New Leadership*. New York, Harper Business.
- Coopey, J. (1995). "The Learning Organizations: Power, Politics and Ideology", *Management Learning*, 26 (2), 193-213.
- Coopey, J. (1998). "Learning to Trust and Trusting to Learn: A Role for Radical Theatre", *Management Learning*, 29 (3), 365-82.
- De Gues, A., P. (1988). "Planning as Learning", *Harvard Business Review*, 66 (2), 70-4.

- Dovey, K. (1997). "The Learning Organization and the Organization of Learning: Power, Transformation and Search for Form in Learning Organizations", *Management Learning*, 28 (3), 331-49.
- Easterby-Smith, M.; Snell, R. and Gheradi, S. (1998). "Organizational Learning: Diverging Communities of Practice", *Management Learning*, 29 (3), 259-72.
- Fayol, H. (1949). *General and Industrial Management*. London, Pitman Publications.
- Fisher, K. (1993). *Leading Self-Directed Work Team*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Fondas, N. (1997). "Feminization Unveiled: Management Qualities in Contemporary Writings", *Academy of Management Review*, 22 (1), 257-82.
- Garvin, D., A (1993). "Building a Learning Organization", *Harvard Business Review*, July-August, 78-91.
- Gheradi, S. (1994). "The gender we think, the gender we do in our everyday organizational lives", *Human Relations*, 47 (6), 591-609.
- Gilligan, C. (1982). *In a Different Voice: Psychological and Women's Development*. Cambridge: MA Harvard University Press.
- Grant, J. (1988). "Women as Managers: What they can offer to Organizations", *Organizational Dynamics*, Summer, 56-63.
- Grey, C. (1994). "Career as a Project of the Self and Labour Process Discipline", *Sociology*, 28 (2), 479-97.
- Kanter, R., M. (1977). *Men and Women of the Corporation*. New York, Basic Books.
- Lank, A.,G. and Lank, E., A. (1995). "Legitimizing the Gut Feel: The Role of Institution in Business", *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 10 (5), 18-23.
- Lee, C. (1994). "The Feminization of Management", *Training*, 31 (11): 25-32.
- Locke, E. and Lathan, G., P. (1984). *Goal Setting: A Motivation Technique that Works*. London, Prentice Hall.
- Lyn, R. (1966). "Brainwashing Techniques and Child Rearing", *British Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 5, 270-3.
- Marshall, J. (1984). *Women Managers: Travellers in a Male World*. Chichester: Wiley.
- McGregor, J.; Tweed, D.; Kolb, D. and Henley-King, J. (2000). "Gender and Managerial Competence: A Comparative Study of Male and Female Manufacturers".

British Academy of Management Conference Proceedings, Edinburgh, United Kingdom.

- McGregor, D. (1960). *The Human Side of Enterprises*. New York, Harper and Row.
- Mills, D. and Friesen, B. (1992). "The Learning Organization", *European Management Journal*, 10 (2), 146-155.
- Miller, P. and Verduin, E. (1979). *The Adult Education: A Handbook for Staff Development*. Houston, Gulf Publications.
- Mills, A., J. and Murgatryod, S., J. (1991). *Organizational Rules: A Framework for understanding Organizational Action*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Mintzberg, H. (1991). *Managerial Work: Forty Years Later*. In S. Carlson (1991). *Executive Behavior* reprinted with contributions by H. Mintzberg and R. Stewart: 97-119. Uppsala, Sweden: *Studia Oeconomiae Negotorum* 32.
- Panchalan, R. (2001). "Tomorrow's Leader-Manager", Paper presented at the IFMR Conference, Chennai, India.
- Roberts, J. (1984). "The Moral Character of Management Practices", *Journal of Management Studies*, 22 (3), 287-302.
- Schein, (1976). *Think Manager, Think Man*.
- Senge, P. (1990). *The Fifth Discipline*. London, Century Books.
- Singh, V. and Vinnicombe, S. (2000). "Gender and Impression Management Strategies: Managing the Good Opinions Held by Others for Career Success". *British Academy of Management Conference Proceedings*, Edinburgh, United Kingdom.
- Stata, R. (1989). "Organizational Learning: The Key to Management Innovation", *Sloan Management Review*, 12 (1), 63-74.
- Roberts, J. (1984). "The Moral Character of Management Practice", *Journal of Management Studies*, 22 (3), 287-302.
- Taylor, F., W. (1911). *The Principles of Scientific Management*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Willmott, H., C. (1984). "Management Education: Provocations to a Debate", *Management Learning*, 25 (1), 105-136.