

Brief Case: A Portfolio of Commentary and Opinion

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1. The Female Manager

The article in *Long Range Planning* (February 1983), by Cary L. Cooper and Marilyn J. Davidson attracted a good deal of comment. I was sent a cutting from the Wall Street Journal, which quotes a survey by the executive search firm Korn/Ferry International and UCLA Graduate School of Management. The article is headlined *Female Bosses Say Biggest Barriers are Insecurity and 'Being a Woman'*. Differences in marital and family status of executive women compared to executive men were significant among the respondents—more than half of the women were single, compared to less than 5 per cent of the men. Nearly two thirds of the women were childless while 97 per cent of the men were parents. The fact that there are these differences underlines the different pressures which women face compared to men, at least in the U.S.A.

My correspondent in her covering letter from the U.S.A. says 'Another point that might have been made by the authors is that women are still not being paid comparable salaries. I've just read an article pointing out that women know this and it leads to lower self esteem and frustration.'

The letters I have received for publication are all from senior women executives, but are by no means unanimous:

To Brief Case,

'The Female Manager—The Pressures and The Problems' straightforwardly addresses those critical areas facing upwardly mobile females.

In discussions with female colleagues, a major area of concern centers around our inability to crack the 'Old Boys Network', i.e. to be considered a *social* equal. Rarely is a woman asked to join a Saturday morning game of golf or to stop for a drink after work. Many a problem is discussed and solved and many an alliance formed in relaxed atmospheres such as these where a woman's input is not invited.

I have a rising suspicion that the movement and momentum of companies attempting to promote women into management has slowed and, until we are completely accepted and not just tolerated, I am concerned we shall start to see a deterioration of the statistics of women managers as a per cent of total managers when the next survey is taken.

Jerolene A. Drefs,
Vice President and Treasurer,
Newsweek,
New York.

To Brief Case,

The Female Manager—The Opportunities

If I were a male manager all my worst fears about employing female managers would be reinforced by the article of Professor Cooper and Marilyn Davidson, and I would retire to my cosy perception of Man's World Woman's Place, safe in the knowledge that as long as I did nothing to encourage them, women would not of their own initiative and commitment break the 2 per cent Boardroom Barrier and challenge *my* position.

After all, it is not as though the country is short of 'managers' even though good ones are few and far between, and by the sound of it women are an even higher risk than men, with their additional stress etc. problems. Add to that the fact that they might want extensive maternity leave, to say nothing of creches for their babies, and they, the female *managers* might want *flexitime*.

But I am not a male manager, I am a female not-quite-yet Director in the Medical Equipment Industry. I happen to have the 'Ideal Corporate Husband', who looks after the boys when I am not at home, and cooks and buttles when I am, I have had my share of the knocks—redundancy, career blocks—and my self-inflicted guilt complexes, but I am still there. When the going gets rough I'll take Mogadon to help me sleep, and fill myself with Vitamin B6 to overcome the worst of the PMT. After all, with 3 million unemployed in the U.K. the world does not owe *me* a living. And it is tough out there . . . and not getting any easier. Surely this is not the time to ask organizations to cope with yet more burdens.

And that is where this article falls down. It is attempting, if to solve anything, to solve yesterday's problems. Four decades ago women *had* to work, though not necessarily embark on careers. The men were at war. Afterwards for a while there were not enough men to go round, and still the work had to be done, and unattached women had to support themselves. Today the situation is quite different.

Once more in the U.K. there are more or less equal numbers of men and women, and the chances of pairing off are fairly high.

There are not enough jobs, let alone careers, to go round.

Winging for more creches, special treatment for hard-done-by female managers in this environment can surely only fall on deaf ears.

After all, why *should* organizations help women? Why *should* it be incumbent upon them to develop corporate personnel policies to minimise our stresses and strains? What will be the benefits to the organization and society as a whole of such a course of action?

Yet many of us are well trained. Some of us could be very good managers. Why shouldn't we have careers? We can and do, but to increase our number could the answer lie in the theme of quality rather than quantity.

Firstly perhaps women should do something to help themselves. LACK OF COMMITMENT ON OUR PART IS THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT FACTOR IN OUR LACK OF CAREER SUCCESS. How many of us really want to have management careers? Oh yes, we might flirt with the idea of the glamour, the possibilities, but how many of us wing when the going gets rough? But Management is a tough game. Women going into it must recognize the difficult environment that they will face before embarking on it as a career. Hardly a place, one might say, for flexitime, and long periods of absence.

The fact is that today, and for the foreseeable future most women at some stage in their lives have a choice—to follow a salaried career/paid job or to entrust the role of money making to a man. Very, very few men have such an opportunity. Faced with this opportunity most women exercise the option to leave money-making to men—not always initially, but frequently at the time of starting a family. How many men, given the clear option would *themselves* opt to leave money-making to their partners.

Let us not be hung up on the stresses of women in management today.

The real opportunities for women *and* men in the future lie in improving the quality of life as well as of management. To see the opportunities we must make certain assumptions about the future. For example, it is reasonable to suppose that the family, as we know it will remain a feature, i.e. people will go on getting married and divorced and having children. It is also reasonable to assume that unemployment will remain a feature of Western society for the medium to long term, and that manufacturing industry will decline, with increased activity in service and leisure industries.

That technology will continue to impact on women's *jobs*, as opposed to careers, can also be assumed, and that organizations will be very slow to change merely to

accommodate women, not least because they are too busy changing to survive and thrive.

In this scenario, as now, the vast majority of managers will be married people with children. The question is, what will be their sex?

What committed, good women managers and aspiring women managers can offer society is to relieve our menfolk of the burden of money making. We in turn can hold our heads high, knowing we have a real role to play, pursuing a committed career to the mutual benefit of all concerned. Most of the extra stresses associated with guilt disappear, and there is no doubt in my mind that the committed househusband is far more productive than the average housewife, finding time as mine does, to garden, paint, sculpt, write, shop, with never an idle moment for valium.

As for the remaining problems for women managers in this scenario once she has a *real* role, and there are more of us, most of the old prejudices must disappear. The average woman needs, incidentally, no more than about four weeks off work to have a baby, and that can be fitted into holiday routine. A few items remain to be changed in the statute books. Firstly tax relief should be available on employed domestic help to cope with those chores which for one reason or another the family opts to subcontract. Secondly sex discrimination in Pension and Life-Insurance Schemes must be abolished.

Apart from that it is up to us. Management is not an easy task, and it is one which is currently done rather badly in the U.K. To employ highly stressed women, and expect organizations to provide them with special facilities and working hours will solve nothing. An alternative for women and society is to encourage the either-sex-one-career-partner family.

But how many women would take up the challenge?

Dr. Barbara A. Page-Roberts,
Sales Manager, Eastern Europe,
Overseas Marketing Corporation (Medical) Ltd.

To Brief Case,

Broadly speaking I feel the article contributes little to a subject which needs a huge amount of care and tact. There is a tendency in such reports to promote a treatment of women verging on the kid gloves approach which is costly and unnecessary. Worst of all it might contribute to antagonism and frustration amongst male management and the 'cause' of women would be reversed.

The article goes overboard on statistics. Personally, I find that inhibits a reading flow and found in this case that their contribution was low. I find it not at all surprising that the highest incidence of coronary heart disease is in those who are working women and who have children.

The section on role requirements, brings out an interesting point about women's failure value being in-built. I hope this is not always true as the implications of aggression as a possible reaction to this is an unhappy one. But certainly I see from experience that women often work comparatively harder than men for the same achievement—the old

adage is true that a woman has to be much better than her male counterpart in order to do as well.

The article does not distinguish between different sectors. I think this could be useful. A girl friend of mine who is an engineer and sometimes works on oil rigs faces very different problems from those of us in City jobs.

I had a giggle at the 'ideal corporate husband'. Isn't that merely the definition of a selfless person? And how about the 'ideal corporate wife' who might need to have precisely the same qualities? Frankly, I would exclude that from the finished product, although I do think that a fresh approach to marriage and an increasing acceptance and awareness by a husband of his wife's independent career is essential and worth a mention in this context. A very minor point on the points listed: can No. 8 co-exist with No. 1?—I would suggest a different name for No. 1!!

The suggested policy changes do provide a lot of food for thought, although sadly in the present economic climate, I doubt whether many would be seriously considered. The point about day nursery facilities is something of high importance if the future generations of working women are not to produce maladjusted offspring.

It is of course essential to recognize potential good management amongst females in an organization and to provide them with as much encouragement as possible. As this is for the sake of the company (in a commercial world) as much as for the woman herself, the organizational changes must be gentle and not too sweeping. However, point No. 1 (second sentence about retraining) is something which I wholeheartedly endorse although am not sure I understand fully the implications of the first sentence.

Similarly, I do not find point No. 2 clear on sponsorship. Again, women cannot be classed as a 'special case'. They must strive for equal recognition for equal work. There must not emerge a 'mafia of women' approach. This would antagonize.

The question of training was touched on to a certain extent, but it is of great importance as women and men require help in different areas. From experience it would appear to me that women are more skilled in the patient study of problems and policies, but not so adept at dealing with their colleagues, particularly in tense situations.

The problem of maternity leave requires more than a scant mention. This is an area which seems to me vital in promoting women as senior management. One cannot deny one's natural role as principal propagator of the species and, therefore, organizations should attempt to allow for this, rather than ignore the problem.

Alison J. Marshall,
Personal Assistant to Group Vice Chairman,
Barclays Bank PLC, London.

Petroni's article which also appeared in the February issue. Owen wrote:

To Brief Case,

Integration of R & D

Professor Petroni analyses the apparently poor connection between R & D commitment and business performance. The only possible reason to attempt to improve the economic return on R & D investment is the escalating cost of bringing new ideas to commercial fruition.

This raises a spectrum of issues about business which are just as important as the stated problem about R & D, of more efficiently organizing it to the improved performance of the business.

The key is numbers, since it is numbers by which a business is judged. Just because financial matters can be enumerated there has grown up a fallacy that accounts are the predominant concern. They are not, if only because they represent water under the bridge. For accounts to mean anything, they must include a judgment which reflects the 'value held' by stewards of the business for aspects which cannot be quantified by accountants. The investment made by the business in growing the right sort of people is one 'valued held' asset which should be included in the balance sheet, and R & D is another.

Of course, everything depends on what the business is and with high technology the arguments for heavy R & D investment start with insurance and continue to growth targets. But with many businesses the portfolio of product life cycles can only justify limited R & D investment. In these majority of situations the R & D costs cannot be directly set against new product introductions since a number of other factors are beneficiaries; sales support, customer confidence, personnel nurseries, licence prospects, etc. all stand to gain from R & D activities but cannot be account attributed so conveniently. A range of such factors may well suffice to expect significant invention only from serendipity. Even if most of the best inventions are not just luck, their commercial success requires a lot of luck in having the right people around to carry the invention through to innovation.

After comparing the value systems of the components in a business organization, Prof. Petroni concedes that the most important contributor to innovation success is an entrepreneurial individual with certain characteristics compatible with the organization. Via different routes, this conclusion has been reached many times before. Often with some reluctance, especially from sociologists, it has become clear that good ideas still require a special personality to force—or coerce—their fruition. In general, corporate structures discourage such personalities; indeed, most actively root them out and replace them with an organization man.

Until managements are comprised of intellectually mature people capable of accepting personality challenges or even encouraging conflicting intellectual values, there will always appear to be a gap between the 'professional' values and status aspirations of R & D people and the economic performance values and financial aspirations of organization people or businessmen. Whether either portfolio of values is superior to the other is for interesting discourse,

2. Strategic Planning and Research and Development

I asked Owen Nutt, a member of the Editorial Board of this journal for a critique of Professor

but both are essential and the purpose of the organization must be to exploit their synergy.

The value of the contribution by Prof. Petroni is that it will induce thinkers to think further. In the personality power game which is the basis of sociology, the factor most constrained by convention is innovative thinking. Prof. Petroni can be justified if he assists you in penetrating your conventions.

W. Owen Nutt.

3. Contributions to Brief Case

I welcome comments on articles in the journal or matters of interest to readers, and information on planning affairs. Please write to:

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