

The Female Manager—The Pressures and the Problems

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There are an increasing number of women entering full-time careers in occupations that were once male dominated, for example, management. Recent surveys have suggested that more women are pursuing management careers in Western Europe and the United States. The pressures on these women are enormous in view of industry's inflexibility. Corporate policies must change if women are to survive in organizations. A variety of these policies are discussed in this paper, e.g. flexible work weeks, maternal and paternal leave, change and relocation policies, career planning, etc.

The role of women in society is radically changing in Europe and North America. Vast numbers of women are beginning to work full-time and to aspire to climb the same 'organizational ladders' as their male counterparts. Indeed, the latest figures from the U.S. Department of Labor indicate that the 'typical American family' with a working husband, a homemaker wife, and two children now makes up only 7 per cent of all U.S. families. In addition, whereas in 1960 31 per cent of all married women in the U.S. were working, as were 19 per cent of women with children under six; by 1975 the comparable figures were substantially higher at 44 and 37 per cent respectively.

A similar trend is occurring in the U.K., with the male labour force increasing at the rate of only 3 per cent over the last 25 years, whereas in the same period the number of women employed had grown at 43 per cent. In addition, in the early 1950s there were 2.7 million married women in jobs, but by 1976 that figure rose by 143 per cent to over 6.7 million. And most interesting of all, at the start of the 1950s only a quarter of working women were married, whereas today over two-thirds of all women who are working are married.

Not only are more and more women simultaneously pursuing careers and families, but many of them are entering male-dominated jobs, including the field of management. The U.K. University Statistical Record shows that from the early to late 1970s, there was a 33 per cent increase in women graduates entering industrial employment; the number of women in finance and accounting rose from 14 to 23 per cent in that period, in personnel management from 51 to 62 per cent; in buying, marketing and selling from 28 to 36 per cent; and in legal work from 25 to 32 per cent. This trend has been reinforced by the increasing number of women taking university courses in management. Taking a look at the main universities running undergraduate courses in management in the U.K., the number rose from 187 in 1973 to 770 in 1977; as a proportion of the total management students, the percentage increased from 12 to 27 per cent, and in the three largest university management departments the increase was from roughly 10 to nearly 35 per cent¹ in that same period. Even with this trend, the number of women currently in administrative and managerial jobs is still relatively small and the U.K. lags far behind other European countries (see Table 1). In addition, whereas women, for example in the U.S., represent something like 40 per cent of the labour force, less than 1 per cent of them reach top management

Table 1. Women as a percentage of administrators and managerial workers (in all sectors of employment)

	Year	Percentage
Finland	1976	14.4
Italy	1971	5.7
Netherlands	1971	4.4
Norway	1977	13.2
Sweden	1977	13.2
United Kingdom	1979	9.0
U.S.A.	1977	22.2

Source: 1978 Year Book of Statistics.

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positions in organizations. This is common in all Western European countries as well.

The Pressures on Working Women

Although it seems easy enough for women to gain employment at the lower rungs on the organizational ladder, it is proving very difficult for them to reach upper middle and senior management positions. This, on top of trying to maintain a home and family, is creating enormous pressures on women at work, which is beginning to manifest itself in a variety of undesirable ways. For example, in a recent study² carried out by the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute in the U.S., they found that the coronary heart disease rate for married working women was rising rapidly. Their sample was drawn from the Framingham Heart Study, which is the most comprehensive investigation of heart disease ever carried out. All the inhabitants of Framingham, Massachusetts have been undergoing regular medical screening for the past 20 years. The main purpose of the study is to identify the precursors to heart disease in this population. Interested to see what the impact of employment is on working women, researchers at the NHLBI decided to collect information on the employment status and behaviour of 350 housewives, 387 working women (employed outside the home for over one-half of their adult years) and 580 men in the Framingham Study, between the ages of 45–64. All 1317 subjects in the investigation were followed for the development of coronary heart disease over an 8 year period.

Their main finding was that working women did not have a significantly higher incidence of coronary heart disease than housewives, and their rates were lower than for working men. They then analysed the information in terms of married (including divorced, widowed and separated) versus single working women and found a substantial increase in incidence of heart disease. But most revealing of all their results appeared when they compared married working women with children against those without children. In this case they found that 'among working women, the incidence of coronary heart disease rose as the number of children increased'. This was not the case, however, for women who were housewives, indeed, that group showed a slight decrease with an increasing number of children.

In our large scale study³ of female managers in the U.K., we have found very similar results while exploring Type A coronary prone behaviour among women executives. Type A behaviour is characterized by time urgency, hard driving, striving, high achievement, motivation, competitiveness, devotion to work, a preoccupation with deadlines, and abruptness of gesture and speech. Type B behaviour, on the other hand, is

characterized by the relative absence of the behaviour associated with Type A individuals: ability to relax without guilt, no free floating hostility, no sense of time urgency, etc. On the basis of large scale prospective research work, two cardiologists in the U.S. (Friedman and Rosenman) have found, in repeated longitudinal investigations, that this Type A behaviour pattern in all groups of workers is a significant precursor to coronary heart disease and other stress-related illnesses: Type A men between the ages of 39–49 and 50–59 have 6.5 and 1.9 times (respectively) the incidence of coronary heart disease than Type B men. In addition, in a recent study⁴ by a team of U.S. government scientists, they found that Type A behaviour is an even stronger causal agent in heart disease in women than in men, producing more than twice the incidence of coronaries. In our investigation, we administered Type A questionnaires to a sample of 135 senior female managers. The Type A questionnaire yields raw scores which are then designated to categorize an individual as either a Type A₁, A₂, B₃ or B₄, with the A₁ category signifying the most highly developed coronary prone behaviour and B₄ the least (see Table 2).

Table 2. Senior women managers' Type A coronary prone behaviour pattern scores compared to the general population

	Type A ₁	Type A ₂	Type B ₃	Type B ₄
Women managers (%)	21.5	40.0	38.5	0
General population (%)	10.0	40.0	40.0	10.0

It can be seen that 61.5 per cent of our sample were classified as Type A, with 21.5 per cent Type A₁ and 40 per cent Type A₂. Only 38.5 per cent would be classified B₃ and there were no B₄ women. The normal distribution of Type A and B behaviour patterns in the general population tends to be: A₁ = 10 per cent, A₂ = 40 per cent, B₃ = 40 per cent and B₄ = 10 per cent. Therefore, our sample of female managers contained over twice the proportion of the most extreme Type A₁s, who are the group most at risk in terms of stress-related illnesses.

In addition to these results, it has also been found that working women as a whole 'experienced more daily stress, marital dissatisfaction, and aging worries and were less likely to show overt anger than either housewives or men'. Indeed, in a review of the research literature on marital adjustment in dual-career marriages, a University of Michigan team found⁵ that of the 13 major studies in this area, using either a U.S. national or regional sample, at least 11 of them showed that marital adjustment was worse for dual-career wives than for non-working wives.

Women in Management: The Problems They Have to Cope With

There are a variety of sources of stress that can create the above manifestations for female managers, and we see these as dividing into three groups; stressors that are internal to the female manager, those that are created in her work environment, and those that stem from the home.

In the first category are the sex stereotyped behaviours and attitudes that most women carry around with them from early socialization. Some of the more prominent ones in this area are: conflict about working and raising a family, about 'being the boss', about 'being ambitious and aggressive in business dealings', etc. This 'culture trap' creates difficulties for women at work since most organizations are still dominated by male values and behaviours, and women are still encouraged to play out a less achievement orientated, less aggressive and more dependent rôle than men. One of the female executives in our sample highlighted these problems, 'I find it very difficult being the boss, and when I go out with the staff socially and am introduced as "the boss" that embarrasses me. I don't want to be introduced as anybody's boss'. Another interesting comment from another senior female manager, 'I think a lot of women have a built in failure value. They feel that they shouldn't compete because they are women and so they don't'.

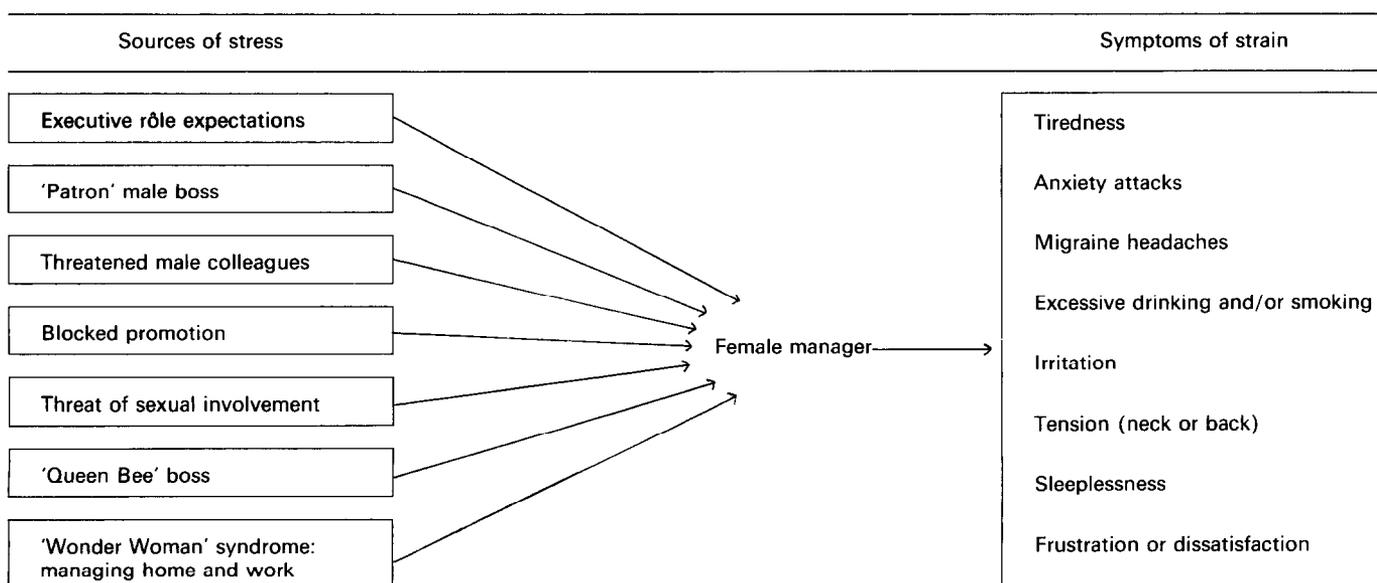
The second category of problems stems from factors in the work environment. One such difficulty is trying to meet the rôle expectations of *being an executive*. Since the executive rôle is usually perceived by both men and women as fundamentally a male rôle, any individual female manager is

unlikely to be seen as adequately fitting or meeting the rôle requirements. In addition, there is the potential threat that many male managers feel about the competence of their female colleagues. Indeed, in an effort to overcome feelings of insecurity, inadequacy and to meet a variety of internal rôle expectations, many female managers work harder, longer, and more thoroughly than their male counterparts or even their male bosses. Frequently, a male boss adopts a 'patron' rôle *vis-à-vis* his immediate female subordinate, protecting and advancing his protegee, but at the same time using her competence for his own advancement. This can create enormous stress on the female manager concerned, because (1) she feels she must constantly perform at her best to meet his expectations, (2) she becomes identified with him and suffers the whims and circumstances that befall him, (3) her own individual talents and abilities are not always recognized by 'significant others', but get fused with the boss's strengths and weaknesses and (4) she is still playing out a 'dependent rôle, and not trying to make her mark on the basis of her own resources.

Female managers also have the additional burden of being used or using their sexuality in office politics or career development. The pressure of sexual harassment, such as advances or exploitation, can create serious problems in the work environment. In addition, women are frequently in the position of utilizing their sexual rôle to achieve certain career or other objectives . . . which can create internal conflicts and tensions that weaken their own self-esteem.

One of the most serious problems women in management face is *blocked promotion*. For the vast majority of women who are struggling for

Table 3. Sources of stress on female managers



individual recognition and achievement, the road up the executive ladder is not so easy. They face blockages at all levels as well as difficulties in the interface between their job and home. Currently, many promotional advances in industry are based on the availability of managers to be mobile, to move from one site to another, from one area of a country to another or from one country to another. This is a major stumbling block for any married female manager, and one that most organizations have failed to address. In addition to job transfers, managers are also expected to be available for short-term assignments abroad or in other parts of the country. Once again, female managers with families are unable to offer their services and this tends to count against them in terms of their prospects for advancement.

Another source of difficulty is 'queen bee syndrome', trying to cope with an aggressive, workaholic female boss. Many early successful women who have achieved positions of influence in organizations have done so by inhibiting many of their female traits and attitudes. In many cases, however, underneath the facade of the dominant and superordinate executive is still a very insecure and less than self-confident and assertive woman. This combination of surface behaviour and hidden feelings, sometimes produces a rather frightening and intimidating figure to junior female managers. The 'Queen Bee' who has worked very hard to attain her organizational status frequently feels 'why should it be easier for them', and pushes her female subordinates more than her male ones.

And finally, the most potentially intractable source of stress on women in management is trying to manage the home and work simultaneously. Although many husbands of working women *intellectually* accept and encourage their wives in their careers, few either psychologically or practically (e.g. by taking on traditional housewife chores) support them. When one considers that most males come from homes where their rôle model was a 'mother at home', the fact that they still expect their working wives to carry out the traditional household duties is not surprising.

This problem area could be minimized if, as Williams⁶ suggests, there were more *ideal corporate husbands* with the following traits:

- (1) has an ego like Mohammed Ali;
- (2) does not expect you to be at home whenever he is;
- (3) shares the housework;
- (4) is not overly jealous;
- (5) understands that your job requires you to travel;
- (6) sympathises with your struggle for equality;
- (7) understands that you cannot always accompany him when he entertains clients;
- (8) is not on his own power trip.

It may be years before such a breed is fully developed in most Western countries!

What Can Organizations Do to Help the Female Manager of the Future?

With the large number of women entering management over the next decade, it is incumbent on organizations to develop corporate personnel policies that will minimize the current stresses and strains, which are particularly being experienced by working women with families.⁷ One way in which an organization can help the executive woman is to recognize her difficulties and provide some support. For example, New England Mutual Life Insurance Company recognized that 70 per cent of their female employees who became pregnant left the firm permanently. They decided to do something to help those who wanted to work and raise a family concurrently, and by 1977 only 30 per cent of the mothers-to-be stopped working. They devised a series of seminars for their working mothers to attend during the lunch hour, and this was offered to over 2300 employees. These seminars explored a wide variety of problems experienced by dual-career parents, as well as allowing a high level of participation so that they could share their difficulties. And most importantly, they tried to get working mothers to make explicit their guilt feelings about not playing out the traditional mother rôle in the home.

Although providing a training experience is likely to be beneficial, it is important that companies acknowledge the reality of dual-career managerial families and accommodate to them. What is truly needed are the following policy changes:

- (1) *Allowing more flexible work weeks for women*, so that they can arrange their work and home commitments accordingly. This might mean more part-time posts or merely a flexible working schedule.
- (2) *Paternity and maternity leaves*. With the increase in dual-career managerial families, there will have to be more *considerate* and flexible policies that enable women to have children or cope with family crises, within natural limits, without loss of employment entitlements. In addition, male managers may want to take over a two career couple (negotiated) commitment, or just to share in the experience and help his wife—paternity leaves are an essential ingredient in this process.
- (3) *Day nursery facilities*. Increasingly throughout Europe, organizations are beginning to provide in-house day care centres for the children of their employees. Since governments have not taken on this responsibility, organizations will have to, at least in the short-term. The U.K.

Central Policy Review Committee reported in 1978 that there were 900,000 children under five whose mothers worked (200,000 full-time). The number of places in U.K. local government day nurseries were 22,000 in 1961 and only rose to 30,000 in 1980. Hardly adequate to meet the need!

- (4) *Change in relocation policies.* This will have to happen from two points of view. First, to allow women managers the opportunity of promotion without moving. And second, to accommodate the needs of dual-career managerial families, when one is offered a move and the other is not. Men should have the 'right to refuse' as women, if the integrity of their work and homelife is to be maintained.

Providing Career Opportunities to Female Managers

In addition to helping the dual-career woman cope with her domestic and work environments, it is important for organizations to encourage women to enter management and then provide them with career opportunities once there. Increasingly, companies are providing 'affirmative action officers' or some equivalent personnel rôle to try and adhere to the spirit of EEC requirements. These people would be responsible for examining the existing imbalances in the organization, and what could be done to make it easier for women to take up managerial positions, which might mean changing the managerial recruitment policy, providing facilities for working mothers, changing male-biased company literature which might put-off a prospective female manager, etc. In addition to these obvious affirmative action-type activities, the whole infrastructure of the organization will have to be changed once the woman takes up her post. Ekberg-Jordan⁸ and others have suggested a number of organizational changes that are needed to support the careers of female managers:—

- (1) *Career planning and counselling.* Because of the special needs and circumstances of some women, it is necessary to plan and counsel women on their short range job prospects and their long term career goals. This may include a period of retraining or updating at some suitable time in her career, as well as providing a periodic mechanism for feedback on their current performance.

- (2) *Providing senior management sponsorship.* To encourage and help support women managers, a system of sponsorship within the organization can be useful in the corporate jungle. This rôle would entail helping the female manager meet colleagues, better understand the organization's informal procedures and customs, and acquaint her with any other peculiarities of corporate life (e.g. myths, history, etc.).
- (3) *Helping male managers to come to terms with women managers.* To establish training programmes within the company to get male and female managers to share their perceptions, stereotypes, myths and feelings about one another, and particularly about the rôle of women in management. The goal here is to try and change male managers' views of their female counterpart, and to encourage them to be more supportive and less threatened.
- (4) *The creation of informal support networks for all women managers.* This may be particularly helpful while women are still very much in the minority in the organization, but less necessary as they begin to establish themselves in larger numbers and throughout the organization.

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