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IT'S A MAN'S WORLD

But making the work environment more friendly to women can lead to increased collaboration, higher job satisfaction and an organization more ready for change.

It's a Man's World

Sasha Galbraith

Traditional command-and-control organizations dominated by male hierarchy don't always create female-friendly environments. But with a few changes to organization design, it's possible to create more effective organizations that can easily adapt to changes in the networked, global marketplace.

The phenomenon has been called the leaky pipeline, the black hole and the Bermuda Triangle, but high-powered executive and professional women are increasingly opting out of, or otherwise disappearing from, the workforce.

The common belief is they are going home to take care of children or parents. But according to Pamela Stone's *Opting Out? Why Women Really Quit Careers and Head Home* and Sylvia Ann Hewlett's *Off-Ramps and On-Ramps: Keeping Talented Women on the Road to Success*, women are often pushed out by inhospitable workplaces. In fact, the long-standing masculine competitive model of organizations may be at the root of the struggle to bring true diversity to the workplace.

Consider the traditional command-and-control organization. It features a strong and well-understood hierarchy where power is held over others of lower status; a codified set of rules and procedures on how the work gets done; a leadership structure of like-minded, often Caucasian men who see eye-to-eye on most issues; a control system that is based on chain-of-command backed up with appropriate penalties and rewards; a communication process that is infrequent, on a need-to-know or task-oriented basis and is used to convey information or solve problems; and a top-down culture that values autonomy, authority, status and detached professionalism. Such organizations were designed by men, primarily for men, and, as such, tend to be uncomfortable for women — much like trying to write with your left hand if you are right-handed.

Now compare that to a new type of organization designed with more feminine attributes. It has a rel-

atively flatter and more flexible hierarchy wherein people hold power "with" others; a set of guidelines that indicate a general road map on how work gets done that allows flexibility in the specifics depending on the project at hand; a leadership team of two or more people who have different, but complementary points of view; a control system that is based on peer and social approval — or disapproval — backed up with positive reinforcement; an intensive, multidirectional, frequent and multichannel communication process used to build relationships and trust, establish a sense of community and shared values, and develop commitment to the greater goals of the organization; and a family-oriented, inclusive culture that values empathetic listening, community, quality of life and a sense of working toward a higher goal.

Forcing XX to Act Like XY


If you're a woman forced to exist in a male-dominated and male-designed organization, life can be difficult. While not all men or women conform to the stereotypes, there are some prevalent tendencies worth noting. Much has been written about the need for women to adapt and change their behavior to fit with the organizational norms. For example, typical advice tells women to be more focused, confident and direct in their discussions with men, who tend to see conversations as a means to solve a problem or convey information. Other differences are not so clear.

Hierarchy, a necessary component of large organizations, is an inherently masculine construct that comes from the military. Women tend to prefer to build connections with other people and see themselves as



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relative equals. Thus, a relationship defined by power over others is not as natural a state for women as it is for men. Reward systems are often subjective and based on individual performance, even if the job requires teamwork. This can be a problem for both men and women, but it's compounded if the person being appraised is a woman and the appraiser is a man. The tendency is to judge her using a double standard of perceived female attributes — how she looks, how nurturing she is with others, her work-life values — against her accomplishments in her “male” role.

Similarly, fixed and long hours on the job tend to be associated with male-dominated organizations and “extreme jobs” like those found on Wall Street and in accounting and legal professions. When workers are given the flexibility to craft their workflow and job schedules around their own priorities, companies have experienced, on average, a 10 percent increase in productivity, reduced absenteeism and employee turnover and more commitment to the organization. When the Chubb Group of Insurance Companies implemented a flexible workflow program, it gained a 9 percent increase in daily customer contacts, an 11 percent increase in timely benefits payments and three hours per day of extended business coverage, since some employees wanted to start work earlier and others decided to finish later. Further, many companies that implement female-friendly policies find that men thrive, as well.

There is a need for the conventional, command-and-control type of organization. A consensus-based decision process is not ideal for an airline pilot facing a crisis situation or an army in a time of war. But in today's complex and highly competitive business environment, where companies have multiple customers in multiple markets all demanding custom-designed solutions to their issues, the organization that can execute multiple initiatives quickly and flexibly has an edge over its competitors. Companies are finding they must move from vertical and hierarchical forms to horizontal and

networked models that are more flexible and adaptive and are necessary in today's world. This is why newer forms of female-friendly organizations are emerging.

What Is a Female-Friendly Company?

A female-friendly company is more gender balanced — on average, 52 percent women employees versus 38 percent women in male-dominated firms. The corporate strategy may or may not be clearly defined, but the vision and operating principles are. Employees often feel they are part of a team directed at impacting a higher goal that is usually inspired by the founder or leader. Similarly, the culture at a female-friendly organization is often described as family friendly, collaborative, lacking competition, flexible, balanced and embracing quality of life. People are hired primarily for interpersonal and organizational fit. Skills, which decay rapidly, are secondary, since the belief is a motivated person with the right attitude can learn the job. With the increasing need for people to work seamlessly across business units, functions, channels and regions, organizations must foster high social capital, without silos, and an ability to manage conflict constructively in order to solve problems. The managers in key roles must be naturally collaborative, build networks, live the company's values and be able to influence without authority. This is not the type of organization where a person with the need for a command-and-control leadership style will thrive.

In a female-friendly organization, project and process knowledge may be captured in documents or computer databases, but they tend to be transmitted via person-to-person interactions, which build relationships and shared values. Finally, reward and promotion policies are clear, honest, objective and fair. For example, a woman-designed company in Seattle pays all of its employees, including senior project managers, on an hourly basis. The founder strongly believes she is treating her employees with more respect and fairness. She said if she paid an employee a salary, every hour

Top 10 Indicators of a Male-Centric Company

1. Less than 10 percent of board members are women.
2. Less than 30 percent of managers are women.
3. Women hold the vast majority of low-paid, non-career track jobs.
4. Certain assignments are perceived as too risky or not appropriate for women. For example, running a construction site in a Muslim country.
5. People are force-ranked in the performance appraisal process.
6. The organizational culture is performance-driven, to the near exclusion of all other values.
7. Bonuses are awarded based on individual performance using subjective criteria.
8. Face time is extremely important, along with putting in marathon hours on the job.
9. Few or no work-life flexible programs are offered, or if they are offered, high-potential employees are discouraged from using them.
10. The concept of fairness is rules-driven: What applies to one person applies equally and unbendingly to all.

that person works beyond the standard 40 hours per week profit is going directly into the owner's pocket. In addition to the hourly compensation, the founder establishes an annual profit-sharing pool of money, a discretionary fund that varies depending on the profits of the business. Every employee, regardless of seniority or tenure in the company, receives an equal distribution from that fund.

How to Create a Female-Friendly Organization

Creating an organization that takes advantage of all the talents that both women and men have to offer is more about the soft side of organization design — processes, reward systems, people practices — and less about structure. First, get the facts and root out the myths. What is valued is measured. When the Bank of Montreal established a task force to find out why women were not reaching the top of the organization, it unearthed several stereotypical attitudes that were preventing women's advancement. Survey respondents said women didn't excel because they didn't have as much education as men in the bank, but a review of the data showed women were as educated as the men. Similarly, a common belief was that women quit to have children and thus weren't committed to their jobs, but in fact, 98 percent of employees who took maternity leave returned to work.

By no means an exhaustive list, here are some additional policies to implement:

- **Make the business case for diversity.** Studies show companies with more women in management and more female directors have higher return on equity, higher revenue, higher profit, higher total return to shareholders and lower share price declines than their competitors.
- **Fill the pipeline.** Companies must actively work to build a critical mass of women. In 2008, Norway enacted a controversial law mandating 40 percent of all corporate directors must be women. While the

male establishment balked at the law, it was a group of female directors at international energy company Statoil who pushed a corruption probe that led to the resignation of the CEO and chairman.

- **Root out bias from the hiring and appraisal process.** Cisco installs a woman and person of color on every interview team to ensure there is a variety of views on each candidate.
- **Make it easy to network and communicate.** Co-locate teams, provide rotational assignments and sponsor training and problem-solving events where networking is a natural outcome.
- **Remove barriers to success.** This includes allowing work groups to establish their own process flow and hours; promoting balance between work and life, such as shorter meetings with more breaks; reviewing the reward system to ensure collaboration, fairness and transparency; establishing clear guidelines on job requirements and how promotion decisions are made; providing training in both technical subjects and leadership; encouraging peer support networks; actively promoting mentoring; and reaching deep into the organization to promote promising women.
- **Adopt a zero tolerance policy toward authoritarian command-and-controllers.** This may require coaching and possibly removing a stellar performer who does not live the collaborative values.

With skill and perseverance, companies can transform themselves into agile and networked organizations that meet and exceed the requirements of increasingly demanding customers and, at the same time, foster an environment that delights their women managers and plugs that leaky pipeline. **TM**

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