Gender Diversity: Changing Stereotypes in Organizations

Dr Parveen Prasad

Associate Prof, M U College of Commerce, Pune

Abstract- Diversity has been established to be a compulsory imperative in Organizations today. Human Resource policies are being tweaked to accommodate a workforce who is diversified in a multitude of aspects including gender, which appears to be a popular variant in diversity. This study investigates the nuances of changing perceptions of people towards stereotypes of gender. The implication of gender based character is considered important in making assumptions about the behaviours of the gender. In this study, 440 respondents of various ages and occupations were contacted as primary data, to mark their perceptions of character associated with gender like aggression, domination and being excitable. The findings appear to be counter intuitive to popular stereotype perception where 34 per cent of women are considered aggressive, 35 per cent of women are considered dominating and 35 per cent of women are established to be excitable and volatile. These findings reflect the changing scenario and environment of female gender today which is being manifested in their non stereotype behaviour.

Index Terms- Diversity, Stereotype, Gender, Counterintuitive, Changing

I.   INTRODUCTION

Literature in Organizations focuses on diversity known to enhance greater creativity, innovativeness and quality decision making. Research shows that increasing diversity in the workforce would be beneficial to organizations in terms of gaining critical resources. (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978) and where corporate governance is concerned, benefits at the strategic level are positively related to diverse top management.(Eisendadt and Bougeois,1988). The presence of demographic heterogeneity at the top management level is expected to increase firm performance; hence heterogeneity is suitable for complex, ambiguous business operations and the decision making processes are structured in nature. As clarified in literature, demographic diversity includes gender, age, race and ethnicity (Pelled, 1996; Maznevski, 1994)

Some empirical findings indicate that diversity results in greater knowledge, creativity, innovation and thus, organizations tend to become more competitive (Watson and all, 1993) and diversity also is able to attract and retain the best talent available. (Coz and Blake, 1991)

Studies such as Cox and Blake, 1991, Agocs and Berr, 1946, and Robinson and Dechant, 1977, proposed that diversity management reduces turnover and absenteeism, attracts the best workers, increases sales and marketing efforts, enhances creativity and innovation and improves decision making.

According to the US Department of Labour, "almost three quarters of women were employed in management, professional, sales and office occupations in 2006, compared with about half of men."These professional fields are perhaps among the most powerful lucrative and highly regarded in the job markets and changes in these fields have created an advantageous opportunity for many women. While there has been a dramatic decrease in explicit sex based discrimination, discrimination still in less apparent yet almost equally harmful form. This implicit sex based discrimination prevents women from fully benefitting from high earning positions. Women especially at the managerial level, continue to face numerous obstacles pertaining to matters such as compensation, promotion, and representation.

One of the factors that underlie this particular form of sex based discrimination involves the concept of perception. In Organizational Behaviour theory, perception is defined as the way in which people observe, view and interpret others and events around them to create a sense of order for their environment. Perception greatly affects the attitudes, employees have of others and themselves as well the decisions they make within the organization. Biases or systematic tendencies often distort these perceptions, leading to inaccurate assessments and evaluations. With regard to women in the workplace, this gender based and stereotyping is one of the factors that prevent full attainment of gender equality in male dominated organizations. One of the prevalent forms of sex based discriminations that occurs in todays workplace involves the negative perceptions of female employees by other females in other male dominated organizations. Gallup Polls's Annual Work and Education Survey revealed that half of all adult women would prefer bosses who would potentially be a source of help and advice for lower level female employees. The most surprising implication of this survey is that women themselves, who are fully aware of the disadvantage in the workplace, may be contributing to sex based discrimination.

Perception of the female manager can influence the perceivers' behaviour and attitudes as well. Some of these include the likelihood she will join a women's mentoring program, her adoption of stereotypical masculine and feminine traits, and her general belief s about female managers. These overall behaviours that potentially affect the future success of the female in the organization.

With the rising trends of globalization and expansion of organizational boundaries, the demand for diverse workforce is increasing in order to cope with the global challenges. Fast moving economies and rapid advancement in the technology required competent and diverse workforce in order to get competitive advantage in the global market. Organizations can get better results if they adopt effective staffing strategies

including equal employment opportunities to male and female candidates. Black, Gregerson and Wendenhall (1992) proposed that global organizations need to widen their selection process in terms of selecting best male and female candidates. Hert (2000) highlighted that "stereotypes of managers in foreign cultures suggest a sense of machismo that would impede a women's effectiveness." Based on theoretical understanding it can be inferred that women perform better during international assignments than men because of their high interpersonal skills and social skills. Hert (1998) highlighted that women can adjust more easily in foreign environments, establish social network s more effectively and develop personal relationships faster than men.

Because of the interest in developing a diverse workforce, there is also a growing curiosity to how gender impacts upon addressing workforce diversity issues as they arise.

Workforce diversity is defined as an organization of employees with differing characteristics such as age, sexual orientation, language and lifestyle (Vent Ling and Palma Ruas, 2001). In this regard, diversity results in an organization culture in which each employee can pursue his career aspirations without being imbibed by race, gender, nationality, and religion. (Bryan, 1999). Therefore a priority of todays leader is to put in place a strategy that results in diversity.

A team of diversity experts identified four layers of diversity to help distinguish ways in which people differ. Taken together these layers define one's personal identity and influence how each of us see the world. The primary dimensions of diversity influence our attitudes, expectations, and assumptions about others, which in turn influence our behaviour and perception on gender among other dimensions.

II. OBJECTIVE

This study seeks to explore one of the demographic trends, namely gender, that is creating an increasing diverse workforce. Women continue to enter the workforce in increasing numbers (Fullerton, Toosi, 2001)

From the above theoretical framework and review of articles, it is hypothesized that gender stereotypes are being interchanged and perceptions are slowly changing towards what identifies a man or what identifies a woman.

Hypothesis: Gender based perception contrasts stereotypical images.

III. METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

A questionnaire was designed with characters of Aggressive, Dominating and Excitable mentioned. The respondent, chosen on the basis of judgment sampling, was asked to mark his/her perception based on gender for the characters. The profile of the respondents ranged from working students, to working men and women from different occupations.The marking scheme described was 1 for female and 0 for male. These questionnaires were personally circulated to working respondents of all age groups in the industrial township of Pimpri and Chinchwad area of Pune district. The average age of the

respondents was calculated at 35.5 years. The total number of respondents aggregated to 440.

IV. RESULTS

Personality is considered to be one of the effective factors that cause individual differences and perceptions of character. The results appear to be counterintuitive to the normal stereotypical perception of character associated with females and males. Out of the total 440 respondents, 150 perceived women to be aggressive and 290 perceived men to be aggressive. The character of being dominating was perceived by 154 as a woman oriented character and 286 were perceived as a male related trait. For the character of being excitable, 157 perceived women to have that trait and 283 perceived men to have that trait.

V. DISCUSSION

According to literature sources relating to the meaning of aggressive, it spans from hostile to belligerent, to antagonistic to forceful, dynamic and bold. Review of literature reveals this character as stereotypical to male gender. It appears from the above study, that women today too are prone to exhibit this character quite prominently. 34.09 per cent of this character was attributed to women. Dominating is defined as a wield of power and influence over others, which again is stereotypical of men, as revealed by review of literature. 35 per cent of women are perceived to be dominating and having a superiority complex. Excitable as a character refers to responding readily to something and something new, stimulating and volatile. 35.68 per cent of women are perceived to be excitable and temperamental. These results appear to be fairly counterintuitive to popular perception related to gender character of what is predominantly male and what constitutes predominantly female. When defining diversity, organizations must first go beyond the paradigm that workforce diversity (WFD) is linked to gender, sex or national origin. Diversity represents the multitude of individual differences and similarities that exist among people like sea shells on a beach, people come in a variety of shapes, sizes and colours. This variety represents the essence of diversity .Gardenswartz and Rowe (2003). The above research study reflected the differences which are primarily not gender based but individual specific.

VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study reveals the changing nature of the meaning of diversity and the results of the study show how individual differences and not gender based stereotypical roles determine the perception of character in terms of what is male specific or what is female specific. Human Resource practitioners as well as leaders at the top should be convinced about the changing equations relating to gender. With the growth in education, opportunities for both the genders and sensitivity training related to equality of both sexes, especially in the small globalised world where Mergers and Acquisitions are the order of working, perceptions are continually changing and women increasingly constitute the main stream workforce.

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AUTHORS

First Author – Dr Parveen Prasad, Associate Prof, M U College of Commerce, Pune