

Arab Women Managers

The study of Arab Women in Management was inspired by the Forum on the subject held in the Gulf in 1988⁽¹⁾.

The Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World requested Ms. Leila Canaan⁽²⁾ to do a brief survey on the subject. The purpose of this survey is to establish background information on the status of women managers in the Arab countries and get a feel for some of the problems they face. It is also our hope that the findings may identify possible areas for further study.

This is the report submitted by Ms. Canaan:

There is very little written in management literature about Arab women since management in the region is a relatively new field for women. Recent rapid social changes and its accompanying socio-economic development, particularly in education have produced new and greater opportunities for women to enter the labor force and participate constructively in the development process.

A questionnaire was designed requesting the following information: age, marital status, level of education, position held, number of years at work, problems faced, cultural influence, attributes to success as well as man/woman relationship on the job.

The above was mailed to the forty participants of the Forum. Twelve responses were received. The sample is somewhat small but there is a strong indication that it is representative of the population as a whole.

Findings:

From the data we can sketch a profile of a typical Arab woman manager:

- the majority of women managers work in government services or service companies;
- a small minority own their own business;
- their ages range from 30 to 39;
- marital status: majority unattached; around half anticipate marriage;
- level of education: college, specialization;
- working for five years or more;
- difficulties faced: constraints imposed by cultural traditions in regard to women.

Problems reported could be summarized as follows:

- Traditions in the Arab world influence women managers most in their choice of education and careers.

- The stereotype attitude that women are more emotional than men and less logical, consequently less competent and poorly equipped to handle managerial posts, was upheld by one-third of the women surveyed.
- The majority of women feel that there is a prejudice against women in management which prevents full utilization of their talents and abilities.
- Despite feelings of prejudice, most women reported that their salaries are equivalent to male managers.
- Other major problems reported revolve around issues of subordinates resisting their authority and lack of support by top management which impedes their job performance.

The most controversial finding is that one-third of Arab women managers reported lack of interest in working for a woman boss.

The anecdotes told by the respondents showed a high achievement oriented motivation. It also revealed that Arab women managers are motivated by challenging job assignments and the recognition they get from their supervisors as well as self satisfaction for a job well done, rather than monetary rewards. Fifty percent of the women surveyed contributed their success to a certain needed area of expertise. Here is an example of an anecdote reported by a woman manager:

«As a Taskforce Manager, I was assigned to management in order to enhance recruitment of a special category of UAE graduates to train and develop for national posts. This was no easy task. It was the greatest challenge I faced in my work experience for two reasons:

- (1) Lack of UAE graduates in the specializations needed;
- (2) convincing expatriot managers to accept training and developing UAE nationals to the post.

After great efforts and hard work, UAE graduates were recruited, trained, and put in operational positions. This task has now passed on to the Human Resource Department. However, professionally I have accomplished what was difficult if not doubtful. I succeeded and felt personally proud to be able to include women in the mission, thus serving my country and fellow-women».

This study only scratched the surface and gave a fortaste of a wide range of possibilities for future research. Our hope is that more scholars will delve into this fascinating subject both in the Arab and Western World.

(1) See p. 4 Forums for Women in Management.

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