

Factors which Assist Women in Reaching Centers of Power and Leadership Formerly Dominated by Men

Sabah Khalil Ibrahim Muayyad

(Assistant to the General Director, The National Bank of Bahrain)

This study addresses the reasons for women's absence from various ranks of decision-making in the private and public sectors, and examines possibilities for overcoming the main impediments which affect women's employment and progress in reaching centers of power and leadership. My attempt to address this important issue relies upon field studies prepared by the Bahraini Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs in 1983. In addition, this study also relies upon personal investigations concerning the status of women workers in private corporations in order to inquire about the problems which confront and hinder them. I also surveyed some comprehensive field studies undertaken by a bank in northern Canada on the status of women professionals in that bank and the impediments which hindered their rise to leadership positions. In this, we can easily note considerable similarities between the problems which confront Bahraini, Arab and foreign women alike in the corporate world.

This study focuses on various aspects which influence women's attainment of positions of power. First and foremost, it seeks to discover the nature and extent of the shackles which affect the employment and progress of women. In the work-

place, there is a direct connection between women's lack of effective participation in the growth of the organization and participation in affiliative activities in the nation. Quickly glancing at the highest administrative ranks which

women occupy in the private sector, especially women's participation in jobs connected with decision-making, we find that women's participation at this level does not surpass three to five percent of the total workforce. Until today, we do not find in Bahrain any women directors of hospitals, banks or private corporations.

According to my research findings, women's absence from the highest decision-making levels of organizations stems from three key impediments:

1. Incorrect presumptions and conceptions which limit women to submissive roles in society, and which place them in a specific, tradition-bound context which has a direct impact on male managers' expectations of women workers. For instance, a woman's age presents problems for her employer, whether she is young (and thus, too inexperienced) or old (and thus, no longer capable). A man's age, on the other hand, rarely influences the way he is perceived as a worker by his employers. Many employers also hold a strong belief that women are not as qualified or as capable as men when it comes to

handling great responsibilities. These deeply ingrained conceptions automatically lead to women's own participation in surrendering her power and priorities to men. All too often, the professional woman finds herself in a situation in which she has no choice but to accept a position lower than a man's position in the workplace, no matter what her capabilities and talents are.

2. The absence of a clear and detailed policy on behalf of management which focuses on the development of women as an important social and economic force. If such a policy were to be implemented, it would impact positively on women's employment and attainment of leadership positions in addition to increasing vocational training and employment policies. Such a course of action would inevitably lead to the hiring of more and more highly skilled women. Following a policy of discrimination in organizations, whether intentional or not, results in the appointment, promotion and advancement of men to centers of leadership and decision-making while preventing women from attaining positions at the same technological and professional level. All of the foregoing indicates a need for correction and intensive work to create radical solutions to the problem at the highest management levels.

3. Lack of adjustment on behalf of organizations to changes and develop-

ments which influence social values and customs which impact directly on men and women in the workplace. Our present era is witnessing a generation which suffers from continuous conflicts which require reconciliation between social, academic, family and professional commitments. Women's desire to achieve a healthy balance between all of these pressures appears to their superiors (who are usually men) as evidence of their lack of commitment to and focus

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upon their jobs. Women, much more so than men, are scattered and stretched between so many conflicting concerns and demands, which their superiors perceive in a negative light. This perception has a direct impact on women's opportunities for employment and promotion, as compared to men's opportunities for the same.

Factors which Assist Women in Reaching Leadership Positions

The marginal participa-

tion of women in private corporations clearly stems from a policy of discrimination between the sexes, in addition to women's lack of awareness about their capabilities to demand rights equal to those of men. Thus, it is inevitable that the increase of such awareness must be achieved through the mass media and through women's groups and organizations. This must be done through media programs, targeting the large audience of women workers, which clarify women's progress and problems while also encouraging organizations to strive toward the creation of appropriate solutions to the difficulties of working women. The overall aim should be to effect an improvement of working conditions in general.

It is important to call attention to some factors which can help women overcome the aforementioned difficulties, and which may be considered as the foundation for the creation of a process of equality between the sexes in the workplace:

1. A concerted effort on behalf of organizations to break down the incorrect ideas and presumptions concerning women's work by urging the top ranks of managers to be more accountable in their employment and promotional practices, and to monitor laws and legislation concerning wom-

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en workers, while ensuring that women are aware of their rights.

2. Provide continuous support to women as a complete and integral part of the process of human development, which entails increasing the benefits offered to her and opening the way for her to attain leadership positions equal to those of men.

3. Avoid psychological pressures upon women workers and adopt clearly designed and carefully studied programs and plans for enlightenment, supporting the right of every employee to achieve a balance between work, home, school and society.

4. Coordination and collective work on behalf of the organizations to make every director and manager accountable concerning the extent of his or her contribution to the removal of impediments related to conditions of work. Especially harmful are impediments to women's ef-

fective participation in social and political decision-making, such as the survey of the bases of employment, hiring and advancement required to ensure legal effectiveness and the continued non-discrimination between the sexes.

tems and policies which evaluate and monitor discriminatory actions against working women. Among corporations and institutions in the Arab world, however, we are still suffering from policies and practices which distance women from decision-making and leadership positions.

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With the attainment of education, experience, and economic independence, as well as the creation of clear laws for application in public and private sector institutions which still do not support equality, Arab women will create the best and strongest basis for obtaining their full rights in the work-place. Unfortunately, the Arab woman professional is still at the beginning of this long journey.

In conclusion, it is clear that Western corporations and institutions have made significant progress in creating well-defined sys-

*Translated from Arabic by
Laurie King-Irani*

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