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Appendix 4

The Participation of Women in Multi-Disciplinary Action Teams

Jawad Syed and Peter Murray

This paper argues the case for increasing the participation of women in multidisciplinary action teams as a means for making better use of gender diversity. We argue that conventional diversity-management practices involve a narrow approach towards increasing women's participation in employment. We suggest it is imperative that organisations and multi-disciplinary action teams learn to integrate skilled and talented women and men into a single, cohesive work culture that enhances teams' performing capacities. Based on recent work by the authors, we then build on the belief that women are a key resource for improving the integrative and interpretive abilities of teams, including the capacity of the team generally to deal with difficult and complex scenarios. The paper builds a relationship between feminine values, team-member diversity, and communication skills such as listening and speaking up. In particular, we examine some evidence relating to the communication patterns of women and how they may assist multi-disciplinary action teams.

Introduction

Despite their increasing participation in the formal sector of employment, women's under-representation in top-management teams reveals the ongoing nature of sex discrimination and the reality that gender diversity is not being effectively managed. Some scholars point to the view that gender diversity frequently has a negative direct effect on group performance (Williams & O'Reilly 1998, Stark 2003), highlighting the widening gap between team performance and diversity.

This paper argues, however, that gender diversity can be effectively managed by increasing women's participation in multi-disciplinary action teams. We define the latter as a group of men and women from diverse backgrounds and organisational functions, with equal representation and association, who meet in an autonomous or semi-autonomous fashion to make

decisions related to a range of organisational issues, problems and goals.

Here we outline the benefits of diverse groups by highlighting particular attention to the social aspects of women in teams including, but not limited to, communication benefits, feminine attributes, gender representation and increases in team efficiency on the basis of gender.

Bourke (2004:15) reports that women are significantly under-represented (20 percent) at senior executive levels and on the board even in best-practice organisations. Beck and Davis (2004) report the findings of the second Australian Women in Leadership Census conducted by the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency (EOWA).

The EOWA census data reveals a disquieting picture of women's participation on boards and in executive management positions in Australia's top ASX200 companies, which represent 90 percent of the country's market capital. The data demonstrate very low representation of women in decision-making positions in Australian businesses. See Figure 1.

Figure 1 reveals that despite a high proportion of women economically active in Australia (44.6 percent in 2003), only 3.2 percent of women occupy the highest titles in businesses and less than 9 percent are board directors or executive managers.

The EOWA Report (2003) also reveals that about 49 percent of Australian companies employ no women as executive managers at all, and even though 8.8 percent of executive positions are currently held by women overall, these positions represent only 4.7 percent of line roles.

The report confirms that line roles are a traditional, privileged domain for male executives who make up more than 95 percent of all operational and other strategic positions. Singh, Finn and Goulet (2004) suggest that line-management roles are generally considered more attractive than staff roles since they offer more wide-ranging career opportunities. Yet, employers generally place women into staff positions, where their presence is deemed more acceptable (Kanter 1977). This job-type stereotyping has further complicated the female disadvantage in organisations.

In a study conducted by Catalyst (1998), 47 percent of executive women and 82 percent of the CEOs surveyed named lack of line experience as a major barrier to women's advancement. This female disadvantage is also evident in form of sex discrimination cases reported each year (Syed & Ali 2005).

Gender and Work

Instead of the usual practice of treating the proportion of women and men in organisations as the only index for gender diversity, one must also examine contextual influences such as feminine qualities, communication, learning routines, team processes, cultural cohesion and other factors.

Harrington (2000) suggests that there are indirect positive effects of gender diversity. For instance, enhancement of task orientation and the expression of diverse opinions may counteract the direct negative effects widely reported.

The present paper argues that appropriate structures are needed to enable all members to participate in team processes.

Williams and O'Reilly (1998) report that women and men respond differently. Negative experiences are particularly prevalent in men who display lower levels of satisfaction and commitment when they are in a numerical minority.

This is despite the fact that men in female-dominated groups are more likely to be accepted and less likely to be stereotyped and treated with antagonism. There is little evidence that women experience a negative psychological reaction in male-dominated groups. Ely (1994) emphasises that for interpretation purposes, research on gender diversity must pay close attention to the proportion of men and women in the group.

Generally, women's participation in work in Australia has taken place in an ad-hoc manner. Traditional team formation has been based on a one-best-way approach with almost no regard for team diversity. This ad-hoc almost reckless approach to diverse teams has resulted in a lower representation of women at senior decision-making positions in organisations and also in the increasing incidence (or perception) of sex

discrimination.

Consequently, the potential benefits of gender diversity could not be materialised without a learning culture that encourages diversity in multi-disciplinary action teams.

In the next section, we suggest that working women bring key benefits to organisations potentially improving team processes through gender-diverse teams.

The discussion highlights the "price" that organisations are currently paying by ignoring or not efficiently utilising women's potential as team members and team leaders.

At first glance, while differences and preferences for workforce participation and organisational learning apply to all people regardless of sex, a number of paradoxes exist in relation to whether men learn and communicate in the same way as women.

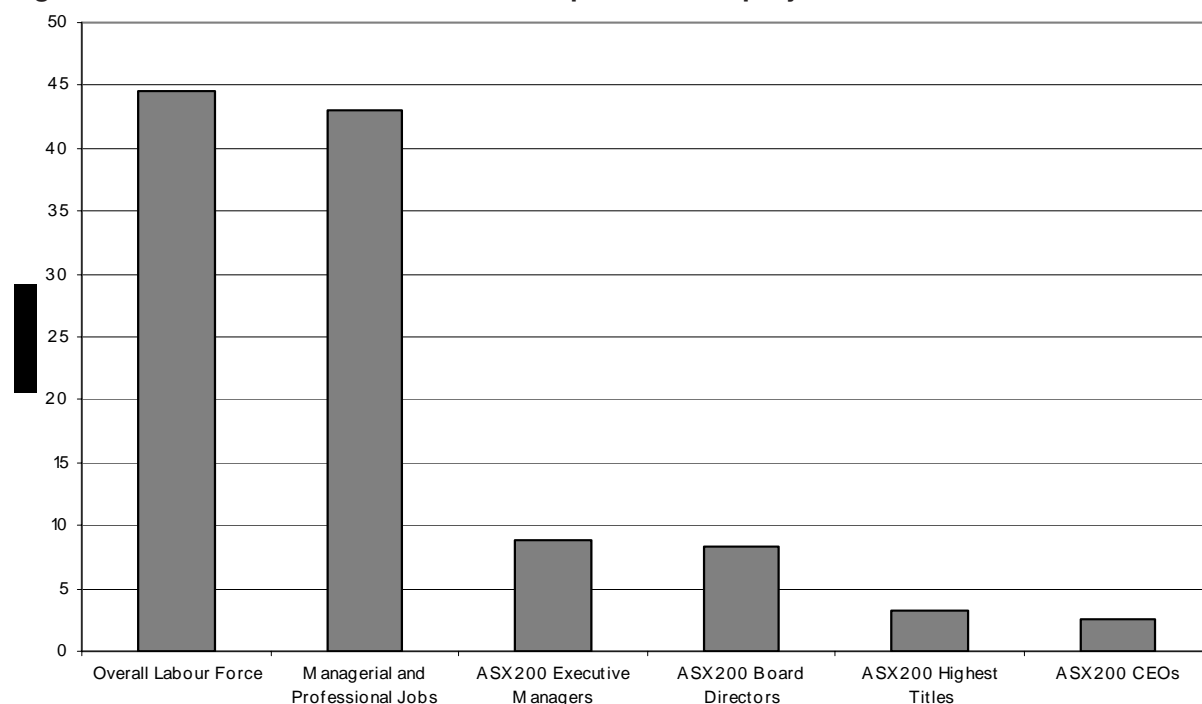
We examine some evidence relating to the communication patterns of women and how they relate to team building and team design.

Based on recent work by the authors, we build on the belief that women are a key resource for improving the integrative and interpretive abilities of teams including the capacity of the team generally to deal with difficult and complex scenarios.

Gender Diversity in Work Teams

In an increasingly dynamic and diverse environment today, organisations are engaged in an ongoing battle to remain competitive. Many organisations deploy work teams as fundamental structures to meet strategic objectives (Elsass & Graves 1997, Kirkman & Rosen 2000). With an increasing participation of women in the labour force, organisations and work teams are becoming more and more gender diverse. Increasing gender awareness (for example, increased female

Figure 1. An Overview of Women's Participation in Employment



Source: Based on data from EOWA 2003

participation) however, does not mean that organisations are fully utilising the potential offered by female (and male) employees.

Peters (2002) suggests that to many women, corporate culture represents the micro-political processes at work, which block their career advancement. Women experience unwritten rules, political manipulation, exclusion from the men's club and hierarchical organisational and team structures. Women recognise that withholding information is a very effective marginalising tool (Kirner & Rayner 1999) used against them by dominant male groups. Informal decision-making among members of the men's club puts women at a disadvantage, particularly when they are few in number and socially isolated.

Change management and restructures are frequently used as a strategy to reinforce male-oriented power structures. Organisational environments are characterised by cloning processes, which arise from executive cultures dominated by masculine values, norms, symbols and ways of operating (Sinclair 1994: ix).

Martell and DeSmet (2001) suggest that gender stereotypes reflect how women are treated and (dis)integrated in the workplace. The literature offers ample evidence of gender discrimination against women in employment decisions (Perry et al. 1994, Davison & Burke 2000) and evaluations of women's performance (Martell 1996, Bartol 1999, Bowen et al. 2000). Female managers are frequently accorded less authority than male managers and are presented with fewer challenging tasks (Reskin & Ross 1995, Lyness & Thompson 1997).

Some scholars (such as Boiney 2001) suggest that diverse teams generate a greater variety of ideas, draw on a greater store of tacit knowledge, make better decisions and more effectively accomplish complex tasks than individuals. Boiney (2001) surveyed 245 members of actual work teams to explore men's and women's experiences and perspectives about being part of a work team. The study reveals that women in general attribute perceived higher performance to their participation in teams. Overall, a higher percentage of women (77 percent of women in the sample studied) reported higher levels of perceived team performance than men (55 percent).

In general, women perceived less severe team problems than did their male counterparts; with the exception of "poor sharing of information" that was the top reported problem for females. In contrast, men identified "unclear or inappropriate expectations" as their highest problem in teams. Boiney's findings appear to support gender theorists' claim that women value relationships based on communication and understanding and men's roles tend to be defined by task and status.

Feminine Values

Geert Hofstede's (1980) work provides a form of categorisation of cultural differences in organisations. While Hofstede's work has been criticised on the grounds that each nation will have its own internal

diversity and that the study has some methodological flaws (Voronov & Singer 2002), his work offers the most common and broadly based framework used to understand differences in diverse values. Hofstede identifies similarities — on five cultural dimensions — in the underlying value dimensions of employees. One of these dimensions is related to masculine and feminine values (later renamed as achievement/nurturing dimension), which describe the extent to which values such as assertiveness, performance, success and competition prevail over tenderness, quality of life and warm personal relationships. Table 1 offers a comparison of masculine and feminine values and their possible implications for individuals' expectations for their work.

Table 1. Masculine Values Versus Feminine Values

Masculine values	Feminine values
Success, progress, money	Relationships, caring
Facts	Feelings
Living to work	Working to live
Decisiveness, assertiveness	Intuition and consensus
Competition	Equality
Confrontation	Compromise, negotiation
Masculine Expectations from work	Feminine expectations from work
Good income	Good relations with boss
Recognition	Collaboration
Promotion	Pleasant environment
Challenge	Security

Source: Based on Hofstede 1991

Table 1 illustrates that feminine values are oriented towards building interpersonal relationships, feelings and emotions, equality, negotiation and consensus. Within the employment contexts, feminine value holders aspire to or expect to have good relationships with the boss, pleasant environments and a sense of security and cooperation. In contrast, masculine values are characterised by material success and progress, facts of life and work, competition, confrontation and good income.

It is quite obvious that at least from a customary organisational perspective, masculine values appear to be "more appropriate". Masculine characteristics demonstrate the "normal" dominant or assertive aspects of behaviour and downplay the team and cooperative

behaviours, which are more readily associated with feminine qualities (Claes 1999).

This stereotypical view of organisational behaviours is now being challenged. Instead, some scholars identify team behaviour as increasingly important for positive organisational outcomes (Murray & Syed, In press). Characteristics described as feminine include, among others, sharp communication skills (ability to be a good listener and to be empathetic), advanced intermediary skills (ability to negotiate and resolve conflicts) and well-developed interpersonal skills (Stanford et al. 1995). Appelbaum and colleagues (2003) suggest that much contemporary thinking is now conceptualising a feminine style of work and leadership.

Furthermore, it is acknowledged that no culture and by extension no individual is either entirely feminine or entirely masculine. Almost every culture and every individual can be located on a continuum between the two extremes outlined in the table above (Hofstede 1991). Accordingly, individual's expectations from work vary from one culture to the other and from one person to the other.

Many scholars suggest that women offer unique psychological qualities to organisations not commonly found in men. Hare et al. (1997) propose that feminine characteristics are more appropriate for transformational leadership. Grant (1988) highlights that women's cooperative behaviour is vital for relational consultation and democratic decision-making.

The study confirms the presence of feminine values such as women's sense of belonging rather than self-enhancement, their ability to express their emotions and their perceptions of power less as domination or ability to control than as a liberating force in the community.

Hall (1996) offers a similar perspective describing women as high context integrating, feeling and intelligent. High context integrating suggests that instead of being motivated by short-term material benefits (such as income or promotion), women tend to integrate with their co-workers and the workplace in a durable relationship.

Claes (1991) describes feminine style as social-expressive because of the personal attention that women give to their subordinates, colleagues and the workplace. In contrast, masculine styles are described as commanding, influential and instruction giving. Helgesen (1990) conducted an interesting study by repeating Minzberg's (1973) diary study examining managerial behaviour. Helgesen contrasted women managers' behaviour with their male counterparts. Table 2 illustrates the differences.

Table 2 demonstrates that women's work routines are more flexible, less mechanical and complex with an interpersonal or humane orientation. In contrast, male routines (such as working at an unrelenting pace without any breaks) are generally extremely demanding, quite mechanical and motivated by tasks instead of personal relationships. Other researchers have also confirmed the findings offered by Helgesen.

Claes (1991) describes flexibility and teamwork among the feminine qualities. For instance, in their approach to work, women have been found to be more relationship oriented than men. Women generally define themselves in terms of their capacity to interact and network with others (Belenky et al. 1986). This view is also supported by Eagly and Johnson (1990) who propose that women are in general more democratic and more interpersonally oriented than men; helpful, friendly, available,

Table 2. A Typical Day in the Office: Male Managers Versus Female Managers

Male Managers	Female Managers
The executives worked at an unrelenting pace and took no breaks in activity during the day	They worked at a steady pace, but with small breaks scheduled throughout the day
They described their days as characterised by interruption, discontinuity and fragmentation	They did not view unscheduled tasks and encounters as interruptions
They separated little time for activities not directly related to their work	They made time for activities not directly related to their work
They exhibited a preference for live encounters	They preferred live encounters but scheduled time to attend to mail
They maintained a complex network of relationships with people outside their organisations	They maintained a complex network of relationships with people outside their organisations
Immersed in the day-to-day need to keep the company going, they lacked time for reflection	They focused on the ecology of leadership
They identified with their jobs	They saw their own identities as complex and multifaceted
They had difficulty sharing information	They scheduled time for sharing information

Source: Helgesen 1990

explaining procedures, tending to the morale and welfare of others.

Kabacoff's (1998) study found that women are rated higher on people skills such as in their sensitivity to others, likeableness, ability to listen and to develop effective relationships with peers and supervisors. Women also tend to be rated higher on empathy (demonstrating an active concern for others, forming close supportive networks) and communication (clearly expressing thoughts and ideas, stating clear expectations for others) than men.

Kabacoff reported that in contrast to women's higher rating on people-oriented skills, men are generally rated high on business-oriented leadership skills. Women are rated higher on excitement (energy and enthusiasm), communication (keeping people informed), feedback (letting others know how they have performed) and production (they set high standards).

Communication Styles

Akans (2005) suggests that productivity in groups is a communication-driven phenomenon. From a social constructionist's perspective, group development is socially constructed in conversation (Austin 1962). Conversation does not simply reflect reality but constitutes the reality of those participating in it (Poole & DeSanctis 1990, Shotter 1993). Ford and Ford argue (1995: 541) that communication not only plays an important role in change management (for example, Bechhard & Pritchard 1992) but that change is a communication-based and communication-driven phenomenon.

In recent work by Murray and Syed (In press), enlightened skills of interaction and interpersonal relations represent one major domain of effective teams. It is suggested here that women are particularly well suited to increasing both the quantity and quality of interpersonal talk by demonstrating high interaction skills.

Despite popular belief that female language generally lacks power and strength (Lakoff 1975), female language can be redefined as a valuable interactional skill. Claes (1999) proposes that women's talk could be described as "feminine" but not without value. In female language, workers are requested, not commanded, to perform tasks. In female conversations, aggressive behaviour and rude directness is avoided. Instead, women prefer to use indirect manners, with rising intonations, in order to preserve good relations within and outside the workplace.

Indeed, women's converging conversational styles (Giles & Coupland 1991) make interaction easier by diminishing felt differences between conversational partners. However, on the contrary, there is some evidence that women's unique conversational qualities are often discounted in organisations (Kanter 1977).

Sigman (1995) describes communication as an interactive dealing, which has consequences for those involved; a primary social process that helps an individual to create social reality. Claes (1991) argues that women are concerned not just with content but also with relationships. Accordingly, their aims of

communication are generally different than men, as are the modes and strategies they adopt. Claes suggests that the conventional rules of conversation must include the principle of collaboration, in order for the relations to remain strong. Collaboration is important so that people can communicate with each other by building a productive relationship. Women and men have different communication strategies, which can also reflect in differences in group behaviour. Fischer and Gleijm (1992) describe communication strategies as the "pecking order" for men and the "crab basket" for women.

In the pecking order it is important that hierarchical position is clear to everyone present. The hierarchy has precedence over content in the pecking order. In the crab basket, by contrast, the group is important so everyone is involved. As a result of these differences in communication strategies, women expect to have their turn and see a fair outcome, whereas men compete for the floor in order to establish a winner.

Jewell and Whicker (1994) found that female leaders were more likely to be consensual leaders and less likely to be command leaders than men. Claes (1991) suggests that men's and women's public discourses are visibly different. For instance, men talk more often in meeting and are more likely to determine the agenda for conversation. Fairclough (1989: 46) argues that power in speech is to do with powerful participants controlling the contribution of those who do not have power.

Consequently, women's voices and communication styles remain undervalued in organisational and group interactions. Murray and Syed (In press) however allude to the importance of enabling devices (such as different types of teams) to provide an opportunity for constant reflection and dialogue for marginalised voices.

Claes (1991) concludes that organisations will remain impoverished to manage change, unless the structures and networks for mediating and diffusing knowledge, values and experiences are expanded to include and facilitate women's and men's unique values and potential. For gender diversity to be effectively managed, it is imperative that organisations shift from the traditional, hierarchical structures to ones based on partnership and teamwork.

Proportion of Women and Men in Teams

Teamwork and gender diversity in organisations has been the focus of a number of recent studies. Koch and colleagues (2005) have investigated the differences in communication patterns of men and women in organisations. For their study, they used Kanter's (1977) concept of gender token, which describes persons constituting less than 15 percent of the entire group composition.

The concept is supposed to make gender more salient and thus evoke more pronounced gender-role behaviour than in teams with a balanced gender ratio. The concept also has implications for self-image and role-expectations. Kanter reported that token women are more likely to have their mistakes amplified, to be

socially isolated and to be found in roles that undermine their status. These results have been documented not only in women managers but also in women police officers, construction workers, fire fighters, military cadets and law students (McDonald et al. 2004).

Koch and colleagues (2005) report that being a gender token plays an important role in team communication at the workplace. For the male token, stereotypicality was seen in some aspects of behaviour and in other-ratings. For the female token, stereotypicality was rather seen in self- and other-ratings and only somewhat in behaviour. While early token research assumed that gender-tokens of both genders would experience negative consequences, recent results indicate that only women are affected by negative outcomes (McDonald et al. 2004).

Researchers suggest that token women experience increased visibility, a sense of social distance and isolation from their co-workers, increased stereotypic self-perception and behaviour (assimilation into stereotypes) and heightened pressure to perform well when they are members of a male-dominated work group.

Token men generally do not experience the same negative outcomes. On the contrary, they may benefit from their token status for example by being promoted without actively pursuing promotion (Yoder & Sinnett 1985). This tendency not only affects actual experiences reported on rating-scales, but also expectations of men and women for token situations.

Cohen and Swim (1995) found that token women (particularly those low in self-confidence) had more negative expectations about working in a male-dominated group than did non-token women, whereas gender-token men and non-token men did not differ in their expectations. Yoder, Schleicher and McDonald's (1998) study showed that increasing status seems to have positive implications for token women.

Discussions and Conclusions

The paper has argued that managing gender diversity to improve the participation of women in multi-disciplinary work teams needs to be redefined. If there is an economic case to be made for gender diversity, it will not be realised until organisations and multi-disciplinary action teams learn to integrate skilled and talented women and men into a cohesive work culture that enhances teams' performing capacities (Weizmann & Weizmann 2000, Stark 2003).

Karakowsky and Miller (2002) suggest that in order for organisations to be effective and competitive in dynamic and diverse markets, men and women must learn to work together more effectively. Organisations must be prepared to take into account mixed-gender work teams and to tackle the additional challenges posed.

Karakowsky and Miller (2002) identify a greater understanding of gender dynamics and its implications for group evolution as an important challenge for managing diversity. Underlying much of their examination and the aforementioned discussions is the view that perceived and actual gender differences continue to inform and influence workplace

interactions.

Despite an increasing number of women in the workplace in Australia and other national contexts, it is evident that gender differences and stereotypes must be understood and addressed in order to help facilitate high performance teams. A narrow focus on increasing women's or men's participation in organisations and a simple de-segregation of men and women into gender-mixed teams without a knowledge of gender dynamics will result in a failure to make the most of the abilities of all team members.

Some scholars identify sex role socialisation as the major cause for women's low representation in top management teams. Lipsey et al. (1990: 394) propose that the popularity of the view that women should be the primary caretakers of young children is responsible for indirect discrimination against them at the workplace.

This view results in differential labour force attachment. Ironically, if a woman adopts some of the so-called masculine qualities in order to improve acceptability, she is seen as a non-conformist, as unpredictable and unsuitable for promotion.

Claes (1991) describes this situation as a no-win situation for women. In order to be successful in their jobs, some women managers choose to behave entirely as their male counterparts. Some women managers are proud to achieve this, while others strongly disapprove of the idea of a woman without the feminine qualities endowed by nature.

Indeed, this situation is a no-win situation not only for women but also for organisations. No organisation wants to deprive itself of the fullest possible potential offered by its employees, women and men.

The social construct of gender within organisations, which tends to discount women's natural qualities and instead requires them to adopt masculine qualities deemed "appropriate" for organisations, is detrimental to organisation's cumulative potential for productivity. Instead, an alternate focus towards integration of women into multi-disciplinary action teams allowing them to utilise their natural skills and talents in an unbiased environment, will result in positive outcomes.

This paradigm shift in organisational routines can be achieved through a focus on training, teamwork, the sharing of power and information and networking. On balance, these activities best suit women's talents and will result in an advantage to the organisation.

Organisational routines and team structures can be built in a manner, which accommodates and combines feminine as well as masculine traits involving strategic thinking and communication skills.

Both feminine and masculine values have a great deal to offer and by extension, both women and men have something to learn from working together (Powell 1988).

Organisations can no longer afford to ignore the previously devalued feminine qualities in view of the need to increase open communication and the emphasis on teamwork, training, networking and the sharing of power and information.

Unless this paradigm shift in organisational behaviour and structures occurs, gender diversity will not achieve any significant breakthrough in economic as well as social outcomes.

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