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SEX ROLES AND THE GOOD MANAGER

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ABSTRACT

Descriptive research from the '70's suggests that management has traditionally been a sex-typed masculine profession; that men collaborated to develop a management science based on the tenets of masculinity; and that by understanding men's experience in military organizations and team sports, much of the mystique of masculine management may be understood.[1] Empirical research from this same time period documents that effective managerial performance is associated with attributes of masculinity in the eyes of both women and men.[2] The research focus on sex roles and managerial rotes is, of course, a response to the entry of large numbers of women into management positions during the '70's.

In the 80's, the popular management literature urges us to consider the flexibility of the "androgynous" manager, one who is neither sex-typed masculine nor sex-typed feminine.[3] The androgynous manager is not limited by the traditional constraints of masculinity of femininity in his or her expectations of self or others. Rather, androgynous managers exhibit a high degree of both masculine and feminine characteristics. As such, they have a wider range of behaviors with which they may respond to the contingencies of the leadership/management situation, including the gendered behavior of the people they supervise.

Two important questions arise Out of a review of the above knowledge. How do our students describe the good manager in terms of masculine and feminine personality characteristics? How does each view himself or herself in terms of these characteristics?

To answer these questions, organizational behavior professors have often used the Bem Sex-Rote Inventory (BSRI) to measure students' descriptions of the good manager and/or their perceptions of themselves as feminine and masculine.[4] The BSRI instrument asks individuals to describe their behavior on a seven-point scale for each of 60 phrases. Twenty are feminine characteristics, twenty are masculine characteristics and twenty are neutral., socially desirable characteristics. Scoring of the instruments yields one of four possible outcomes: an individual may be categorized as feminine, masculine, androgynous (high values for both masculine and feminine characteristics) or undifferentiated (low values for both masculine and feminine characteristics). The median scores for classifying individual scores may be based on group scores or on median scores from Bern's research.[5]

The BSRI has been a useful research tool, but as a teaching or training tool, some adverse effects have been noted, for example, by Davis, Powell and Randolph.[6] They point out that males who score feminine feel, threatened about their self-concept and sexuality.

Our use of the BSRI in teaching and training situations has produced many additional undesirable responses. Some women have felt their femininity threatened by masculine scores, many who scored androgynous have expressed concern that their scores reflect deviance, and those who have scored undifferentiated have joked that they are nerds,

nebbishes, asexual, not yet formed into anything, don't have personalities, and the like. Further, when students or workshop participants are told that median scores differ for different populations tested, the instrument and, perhaps even what it purports to measure, seems arbitrary, and artificial. Justifying and explaining this to the black-and-whiters of the world is a tedious task.

This experiential exercise is designed to take the sting and stigma Out of the BSRI scores and labels, and to use its masculine and feminine constructs to guide personal exploration of each individual's gendered aspect of his or her self concept. Participants have the opportunity to reflect on their beliefs about themselves and about what a good manager is like in terms of masculine and feminine dimensions.

The exercise is effective for introducing issues of managing a mixed sex work team and for examining leadership style in various situations. It is especially relevant for use in classes such as Women and Men in Organizations or Women in Management in colleges of business administration, or classes in other departments in which gender roles and organizational roles are studied. These include: sociology, anthropology, psychology, communication, human development, education and social work.

INTRODUCTION

Details of Class Organization

The exercise may be used with any size class, in any setting and may be completed comfortably in a fifty minute class period.

Preparation Details

One copy of the BSRI per participant is needed with the instructions modified to ask students to describe the good manager (Appendix 2).4

One set of 40 Personality Characteristic Cards per participant is needed. (Appendix 1 contains a 20 masculine and 20 feminine personality characteristics from the BSRI.) Multiple sets of cards may be prepared by typing master pages, Xeroxing these, cutting them up, and slipping the cards into envelopes.

Each person needs a copy of the handout Masculine and Feminine Personality Characteristics (Appendix 1).

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Early in the semester, distribute the BSRI, with the instructions modified to ask students to describe the good manager. (See Appendix 2) Students may complete the instrument in class or as a take home assignment.

2. Score each instrument by summing the values for all masculine and all feminine phrases. Sum the masculine and feminine scores of all the participants to derive group scores.

3. Introduce the card sorting exercises within the context of (1) a unit on gender roles, androgyny, and managerial roles on (2) situational leadership.

4. Provide each participant with a set of Personality Characteristics Cards. Ask them to sort the cards into three piles:

a. personality characteristics they believe are very much like them,

b. personality characteristics they believe are not like them at all,

c. personality characteristics they are not sure about. (Some students may sort no cards into the "not surer' pile. This does not reduce the effectiveness of the exercise.)

5. Allot about fifteen minutes for completion of the sorting.

6. At the end of the time allotted, distribute a handout, Masculine and Feminine Personality Characteristics, and reveal the source of the list as the BSRI. (Appendix 2)

7. Then, ask the participants to subdivide each pile into male and female constructs, using the handout as a guide.

8. When the piles are subdivided, when ask each student to examine the blend of masculine and feminine characteristics in their " like me" and "not Like me" groups. What do the blends reflect about masculine, feminine or androgynous potentials?

9. At this point, return the students scored BSRI instruments. Post the group scores for femininity and masculinity. Discuss how these scores support or fail. to support the '70's research on good managers and masculinity.

10. Ask each student to compare their 'like me" pile with their good manager description. How closely does each person's self concept approximate his or her good manager concept?

11. For those characteristics in the "not sure" category, students are asked to think about the reasons for uncertainty for each characteristics, and to try to place them in the alike me" or "not like me" piles.

12. Ask the students to place an on 'riot like me" and the remaining "not sure" cards. They may note why they do not desire to integrate those characteristics into their self concept or behavior at this time. In this way, negative aspects of both masculinity and femininity will be revealed in terms of each person's experience.

13. Finally, ask the students to consider one "not me" card and to brainstorm three managerial situations in which the "not me" characteristics might be a useful option for a manager to have.

14. Discussion of the exercise may proceed in several ways: (a) instructor leading discussion by the group as a whole, (b) mixed sex groups of four or five discussing their findings and learnings, (c) mixed sex dyads sharing their discoveries about themselves, or (d) same sex dyads or triads exploring their gender role development.

REFERENCES

[1] Research which describes management as a sex-typed masculine profession includes:

Harragan, B.L. Games Mother Never Taught You. NY: Warner Books, 1977.

Hennig, H. and Jardim, A. The Managerial Woman. NY: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1977.

Kanter, R.M. Men and Women of the Corporation. NY: Basic Books, 1977.

[2] Research in which effective managerial performance is associated with masculinity includes:

Powell., N. and Butterfield, D.A. The good manager: Masculine, or androgynous? Academy of Management Journal., 22, k977, 395-403.

Schein, V.E. The relationship between sex role stereotypes and requisite management characteristics. Journal of Applied Psychology, 57, 1973, 95-100.

Schein V.E. The relationship between sex role stereotypes and requisite management characteristics among female managers, Journal of Applied Psychology, 60, 1975, 34044.

Schein, V.E. Think management, think male, Atlanta Economic Review, Mar-Apr 1976, 21-24.

[3] Popular management literature which stresses good managers should be androgynous includes:

Blanchard, K. and Johnson, S. The One Minute Manager. NY: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1982.

Naisbit, J. and Aburdene, P. Re-inventing The Corporation. NY: Warner Books, 1985.

Putnam, L. and Heinen, J.S. Women in management: The fallacy of the trait. Approach, MSU Business Topic, Summer 1976, 47-53.

Sargent, A.G. The Androgynous Manager, NY: AMACOM, 1981.

[4] Bem, S.L. Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI). In J.D. Jones and J.W. Pfeiffer, (Eds.), The 1977 Annual Handbook for Facilitators. San Diego, CA: University Associates, 1977.

[5] Bern, S.L. The measurement of psychological. androgyny, Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 42(2), 1974, k55162.

[6] Davis. S., Powell, G.N. and Randolph, W.A. Using the BSRI to explore sex role behavior, Exchange: Organizational. Behavior Teaching Journal, 111(2), 197B, 24-26.

APPENDIX 1

FEMININE	MASCULINE
Yielding	Self-reliant
Cheerful	Defends own beliefs
Shy	Independent
Affectionate	Athletic
Flatterable	Assertive
Loyal	Has strong personality
Feminine	Forceful
Sympathetic	Analytical
Sensitive to the needs of others	Has leadership abilities
Understanding	Willing to take risks
Compassionate	Makes decisions easily
Eager to soothe hurt feelings	Self-sufficient
Soft-spoken	Dominant
Warm	Masculine
Tender	Willing to take a stand
Gullible	Aggressive
Childlike	Acts as a leader
Does not use harsh language	Individualistic
Loves Children	Competitive
Gentle	Ambitious

APPENDIX 2

INSTRUCTIONS FOR DESCRIBING THE GOOD MANAGER

In this inventory, you will be presented with sixty personality characteristics. You are to use those characteristics in order to describe the good manager. That is, you are to indicate, on a scale from 1 to 7, how truly these various characteristics describe the good manager. Please do not leave any characteristic unmarked.

Example: _____ Sly

Mark a ___1___ if it is never or almost never true that good managers are sly.

Mark a ___2___ if it is usually not true that good managers are sly.

Mark a ___3___ if it is sometimes but infrequently true that good managers are sly.

Mark a ___4___ if it is occasionally true that good managers are sly.

Mark a ___5___ if it is often true that good managers are sly.

Mark a ___6___ if it is usually true that good managers are sly.

Mark a ___7___ if it is always or almost always true that good managers are sly.

Thus, if you feel it is sometimes but infrequently true that good managers are "sly", never or almost never true that good managers are "malicious," always or almost always true that good managers are "irresponsible," and often true that good managers are "carefree," you would rate these characteristics as follows:

___3___ Sly   ___7___ Irresponsible

___1___ Malicious   ___5___ Carefree