Working women and organizations — are they compatible?

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Problems regarding the more permanent integration of women into organizations are considered. Organizations must regard female employees as a profitable investment before they will be prepared to spend time and money on their training and development. On the other hand, it is women's responsibility to convince organizations that a woman can be as committed to a career as a man. Only then can they expect organizations to give them equal recognition and equal treatment. Factors influencing women's attitudes towards work and career achievement are discussed, followed by an analysis of the characteristics and family relationships of career women. Proposals are made on how women and employers can overcome problems regarding the full utilization of women.

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Probleme ten opsigte van die meer permanente integrasie van vroue in organisasies word oorweeg. Organisasies moet vroulike werknemers as 'n winsgewende belegging beskou alvorens tyd en geld aan hulle opleiding en ontwikkeling bestee sal word. Vroue, aan die ander kant, het die verantwoordelikheid om organisasies te oortuig dat die vrou net so loopbaanverbonde as die man kan wees. Eers dan kan hulle van organisasies verwag om hulle gelyke erkenning en gelyke behandeling te gee. Faktore wat vroue se houdings teenoor werk en loopbane beïnvloed word bespreek, gevolg deur 'n ontleding van die eienskappe en gesins-verhoudings van loopbaan-vroue. Voorstelle word gemaak oor hoe vroue en werkgewers probleme met betrekking tot die volle benutting van vroue kan oorkom.

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People become very emotional about arguments for and against the quest for equality of women. Rationality often falls by the wayside. When it comes to integrating Blacks into work organizations, negotiation takes place, behaviour modelling and other sophisticated personnel techniques are used, so that the problem is faced in a very realistic and rational manner. But where women are concerned, emotions take over. It thus seems necessary to take a hard look at the problems concerning women's involvement in the work force.

Integrating women more permanently into the organization poses a problem for both the women and the organization. Women tend to see themselves as a kind of minority group who have to fight for rights like equal pay for equal work, equal opportunities, the right to compete for a job on the same grounds as men, and other privileges mostly granted to men only, such as housing subsidies, bonuses and company cars.

In some countries women join together in activist groups to improve their position — a strategy which does not necessarily solve the problem. With their ranks closed, they tend to be unnecessarily hostile and inclined towards win-lose confrontations and other phenomena of intergroup conflict. They tend to blame male dominated organizations for real, as well as imagined or inflated wrongs.

Organizations on the other hand, do have legitimate problems with female staff. It is no problem to employ a woman for a specific job, as long as she is going to stay there and do that job. If she resigns it is fairly easy to replace her. But, what happens when she wants promotion? The organization has no certainty that she will stay on after they have invested time and money in her training. She could always decide to leave her career, especially on the grounds that her family need her.

A man is brought up from boyhood to accept the fact that he will have to work to support himself and his family for the rest of his life. A woman on the other hand, has the sanction of society to choose whether she wants to work or not, and if so, when. The woman's primary problem is not, as it is for the man, *where* to work but *whether* to work outside the home or not, and for how long. Only after she has made these decisions, can she decide where to work and in what position she would like to find herself.

This leaves both organizations and women in general with confusion and uncertainty. Organizations have

learned the hard way that expensive and time-consuming training of women often is not a good investment; consequently, they seldom do it. Women, on the other hand, see themselves as being discriminated against when they are not given the same opportunities for personal development as men. Furthermore, they take little responsibility for their own contribution to this situation.

It seems clear that we need to investigate the roots of this problem. We also have to find out what distinguishes the career working woman from other women, for example what are her attitudes towards marriage and a family, and what characterizes her husband. Only after that can we start looking for possible solutions to the problems of women in organizations. It is also necessary to realize that it would be useless for women just to demand that society should change. Women themselves must take active steps in order to bring about change.

Only if we do something — rather than complain about the problems as if we were pawns on a chess board — will we bring the rest of society to accept the changes that we are initiating.

The rest of this article will first consider factors which influence women's attitudes towards work and a career, and then review characteristics of career women. Thirdly, the family of the career woman will be considered. Research on these three areas published during the 1970's will be reviewed. Lastly, a few organizational practices which could alleviate some of the remaining problems will be discussed.

Factors influencing women's attitudes towards work and a career

Relative role of dependency

A variety of psychological factors go into the shaping of a woman's attitude towards work and a career. As a starting point, one could consider the relative importance of three needs, described originally by Karen Horney. She wrote that all human beings have needs and potentialities in three main areas: dependency, detachment, and expansiveness. It is necessary to grow in all three areas: 'We all need to be dependent and close at times; we all seek distance, self sufficiency and solitude at times, and we all welcome challenge, self-assertion and even aggression at times'.[1, p 177] If a need in one of these areas is not fulfilled, the person tends to repress that need, which causes an excessive need in another area. In western society a woman's need for dependency is often exaggerated, while the other needs are denied or repressed. Thus she develops her dependency disproportionately, while detachment and expansiveness are neglected. The dependent person regards the process of growth towards autonomy as separation from others and her need for dependency becomes impossible to satisfy[1]. The reason is that to become autonomous, involves a certain amount of aggressiveness and assertiveness, which a dependent woman would find threatening.

Self-esteem and esteem of others

A second factor to be considered in connection with work orientation is a woman's self-esteem. In this context the level of her self-esteem is not as important as is the source of her self-esteem. Carlson[2] concluded that the level of self-esteem is the same for males and females. However, men tend to define themselves in 'individualistic' terms, whereas females define themselves in 'interpersonal' terms. In a study by Carlson and Levy[3] men described themselves as significantly more personally orientated, compared with females who described themselves as more socially orientated. This means that women tend to satisfy their need for self-esteem from interpersonal situations and that what other people think of them is far more important to them than to men. Lack of satisfying interpersonal relationships could thus lead to a lowering of a woman's self-esteem which, in turn, could lead to depression[4].

Effect of external pressures

The effect of external pressures, such as expectations communicated by the group, on a woman's self-esteem should also be considered in this context. According to Cohen[5], differences in self-esteem are related to differences in the individual's response to external pressures. Thus, if one has low self-esteem, one is more likely to be affected by criticism of one's performance by group members, than if one has high self-esteem. Individuals low in self-esteem are more vulnerable to external influences and may even be dependent on external events and situations for the direction of their lives. People high in self-esteem seem to be more resilient, but also to exert more influence on those lower in self-esteem.

With respect to women, one could conclude that in situations where a woman's self-esteem is low, she would have considerable difficulty in making independent decisions. She could also be open to influence from the social group, which could adversely affect her decision making ability.

Choice of achievement mode

Another consideration with respect to a woman's work orientation seems to be her choice of achievement mode. Lipman-Blumen[6] described three modes of achievement for women outside the home:

- Direct mode of achievement: the woman finds it necessary to satisfy her need for achievement predominantly through her own efforts.
- Balanced mode of achievement: the woman places equal weight on her own achievements and those of her husband (and, one could add, those of her children).
- Vicarious mode of achievement: the woman gets fulfilment through the achievements of her husband and possibly her children, while she herself remains passive.

Lipman-Blumen's research indicated that the last group, who chose the vicarious mode, showed less achievement and less educational aspiration than the other groups. The higher achievement and educational aspirations of the groups with either direct or balanced achievement modes came out in, for instance, planning for master's and doctoral degree studies; these women intended to spend their time and energy in a different way. The vicarious achievers had a more traditional view of sex roles and were more likely to prefer the homemaker role. With respect to work orientation, one could thus predict that a woman showing the vicarious achievement mode

would manifest a low level of achievement motivation, as well as little occupational commitment or long-range involvement with a career.

Motivation for motherhood

Bridging the areas of self-esteem and mode of achievement, is a woman's motivation for motherhood. Moulton was of the opinion that having children is important to women because it is linked to their feminine self-esteem. 'It is the one thing that she can do that a man cannot and the last resort if she feels she is a failure. She hopes her children will fulfill her own dreams and ambitions, that she can be successful through them'[7, p 243]. This leads to women falling pregnant for the wrong reasons.

Career choice

Choosing a career is another problem to be faced by women. According to Fransella and Frost[9], some women still tend to give up their real interests or the idea of a serious career, because it appears to them to conflict with marriage and the prospects of motherhood. Unfortunately most of the studies that have been done in this area were done on American students, which has little bearing on the final decision of the older, career-committed woman.

Haller and Rosenmayr[8] found that among middle-class women, mothers showed a higher work commitment after they had had children. Prior to motherhood they worked on the assumption that they would stop working as soon as they had children. The implication is not that all women should have children before they can enter the labour market. Rather the implication seems to be that a woman should feel secure in her feminine identity before she can successfully commit herself to the world of work outside the home. She should feel a deep inner conviction that she is a feminine woman, with or without children. Being a woman should be meaningful to her in either case.

However, we do find that women tend increasingly to become dissatisfied with the traditional role of women. Fransella and Frost[9] mentioned that women nowadays have more access to further education than in the past and that they are attracted to what they see and experience. It is now more acceptable for a woman to obtain further education. Women are becoming more aware that they are free to develop their capabilities outside the home — and they find it a stimulating experience. In South Africa an increasing number of women return to careers or to universities or other educational institutions for further training after marriage and after their children have become more independent.[10]

Another factor that seems to play a role in choosing a career is the effect that it has on the self-esteem of women. Macke, Bohrstedt and Bernstein[11] found that non-working housewives with attractive, high-status husbands felt less adequate than married professional women. The self-esteem of the professional woman thus seems to be less vulnerable than the self-esteem of the housewife. Being a professional woman therefore becomes more attractive.

Conclusion

If we have some understanding of the factors which influence a woman's work orientation, the question is whether it is possible to help women to overcome at least some of these barriers. By training them and allowing them to be more assertive and independent, women can find out that one does not necessarily lose one's femininity in becoming more autonomous. Neither is it a threat to one's interpersonal relationships — to the contrary, it can be most enriching. Nor does having a family preclude the joys of employment and a career outside the home — it rather adds to the sense of fulfilment of being a woman, since it provides additional impetus for personal growth and identity.

At the same time we should not lose sight of the organizational side of the coin. It is legitimate for an organization to wonder whether it is worthwile to invest in training female employees and managers. In this context, it may then be useful to describe some characteristics of career women and what could be accomplished.

Characteristics of career women

Self-esteem and achievement motivation

From the above discussion it is clear that high self-esteem is a prime characteristic of a career woman. Morrison and Sebald[12] found that female executives were higher in self-esteem (as well as achievement motivation) than female non-executives, a view also supported by Birnbaum[13] (see Barnet & Baruch, In press). Part of the high self-esteem is having a definite career identity over and above an identity as a woman.

Achievement motivation is as important as is self-esteem. Kriger[14] found that women in male dominated fields were higher in achievement motivation than those in female dominated careers, with homemakers being least achievement motivated.

In a now famous study Matina Horner[15] found that women were more prone to fear of success than men. This means that women are afraid of achievement, since they might appear to be less feminine, or since it is not socially acceptable for women to achieve. Shapiro[16], however, criticized Horner's findings; his research demonstrated that women only fear success in careers that are traditionally 'inappropriate' for women, for instance, medicine v teaching. These findings do not refute the existence of fear of success; they emphasize the importance of the primary source of fear of success in women, rather than proving that previous conclusions had been drawn from incomplete data. Shapiro's conclusion is also supported by Nagely's[17] findings, that women who choose the more traditional careers experience more role conflict than those who choose pioneer careers. In other words, women who overcome their feminine role conflict, could be as achievement motivated as men.

Traditional v pioneer roles

Some of the older literature favoured the view that the career woman seemed to deviate from the norm. The 'deviant' woman was then defined as one who deviated from the stereotyped idea of what a woman should be like, whether she chose a 'more masculine' career or whether she enjoyed domestic activities. Almquist and Angrist[18]

found that career orientated women had experienced a more enriching background than the usual and that this influenced their choice of a career. These women also reported being significantly influenced by professors or by persons already in the occupation to which they aspired. Women with more traditional career plans very often thought that no one had influenced their career planning or choice of occupation.

The same authors also found that women who chose a 'typical feminine career' were interested more in working with people than with things, and in helping others. They also strove to meet ideals set for them by their parents.

A small but meaningful study by Nagely[17] compared 'traditional' and 'pioneer' working mothers. All of the mothers who took part in the study held at least a bachelor's degree, were married and living with their husbands, and had at least one child living at home. The 'traditionals' held occupations such as counsellor, nurse, elementary school teacher, and home economist. The 'pioneers' included personnel managers, psychologists, a lawyer, an economist, a teacher in computer science and another in chemistry, that is, they were occupied in male dominated fields. The pioneers were found to be more career committed than the traditionals. They expressed the feeling that they would be more reluctant to move in order to enhance their husbands' careers or to give up their careers if their husbands would require it. They also seemed to have integrated their roles as homemakers and career women, whereas the traditionals continued to suffer from role conflict. The pioneers experienced their careers as satisfying, permanent and liberating. The pioneers more than the traditionals, felt that their professional activities were as important as those of their husbands, and they indicated that they had a greater voice in determining how the family income was to be spent. The traditionals had a closer relationship with their mothers, and they saw their careers as secondary to their role as homemakers.

From such information it seems clear that a career woman tends to be a person who succeeds to be comfortable in her feminine role, without necessarily conforming to the traditional sex role, although there are still those who experience role conflict. As far as career commitment is concerned, it is clear from the Nagely study that married women can be as committed to their careers as men.

Problem solving ability

It has always been assumed that women were not as capable as men in problem solving tasks. Berger and Gold[19] found that this assumption did not hold and that younger women were in fact just as good at solving problems as men. An explanation that has been offered is that younger women have been socialized in an environment more supportive of female achievement. Berger and Gold found that older women still perform more poorly than older men. They suggested that there has been a genuine decrease in sex differences in problem solving ability over the years.

By way of conclusion, it can be said that there is research evidence that a woman can hold her own in the world of work, whether she is a mother or not. Since there is a constant interplay between the person and her environment, her personal make-up is not the only factor. If she is married and has a family, the attitudes of her husband and family will co-determine whether she will be able to cope with the dual demands of career and family.

The family of the career woman

The husband

The husband of the career woman can choose to support her in building her own career, he can choose to become a stumbling block on her way to success, or he can remain neutral.

Being supportive does not necessarily mean financial support, as in the case of a home-making wife, although at times it may be necessary and useful too. It also, and especially, implies emotional support. The husband's attitude can make the difference whether it is possible or not for his wife to enhance her career and to enjoy a happy family life at the same time. Lott[20] found that most child oriented men, who were eager to have and to personally rear children, tended to have more favourable attitudes towards women's liberation, compared with men who were eager to have, but not to rear, their children personally. If men could become more involved in the rearing of children, and if women could allow their husbands to do so, this in itself could relieve women of some of the responsibilities of motherhood. At the same time fathers get a chance to discover that sharing some of the family and household responsibilities will not rob them of their masculine image. It rather adds to their understanding and enjoyment of their children, as well as to their understanding and appreciation of the role demands of being both mother and career woman. This in turn leads to a situation where 'sharing' becomes a mutual process; mother, father and children not only share responsibilities, but they also share the joys of a fuller family life. Growth-enhancing experiences for the mother do not necessarily imply less for other family members. If she is a fully functioning individual, the total family unit is likely to be more effective and more fully functioning.

Nadelson and Eisenberg described a woman professor who asked her equally distinguished husband: 'How often do you suddenly think, in the midst of lecturing to a class — "My God, we have no toilet paper"?'[21, p 1073] After this they decided to alternate months for each of them to take full responsibility for the household. The same authors shared their experiences of being married to professional women and stated that a woman with a career becomes a more stimulating spouse and parent. *How* time is spent with the family is more important than *how much* time is spent. These two men considered themselves 'the most fortunate of men' and saw their wives as lovers, friends and 'comrades in loves and lives of high adventure'.[21, p 1076]

A last question to be asked is whether occupational superiority over the husband could be a threat to marital happiness. Richardson[22] found that wives higher in occupational prestige than their husbands and with continual participation in the labour force were significantly happier than women equal to their husbands in occupational prestige but discontinuous in labour force participation. From the research it appears that a woman who continues her career and who experiences a rise in

personal income and career promotion can translate these job-related gains into increased marital happiness. The presumption that professional superiority is *necessarily* a cause for marital troubles thus does not hold.

Furthermore, it is necessary to take into consideration that the wife's occupational superiority did not occur accidently; she earned it through hard work and career commitment. These facts and possibilities are normally considered before marriage or they are thoroughly discussed, like any other matter arising during a marriage. Organizations therefore need not be overly concerned about the consequences of promoting women to higher ranks than their husbands.

Children

It is not only the husbands of professional women who could gain, but also their children, especially their daughters. Findings by Lott[20] agree with those of Rossi[23], that the daughters of working mothers tended to be more assertive, less dependent and less passive than other girls. Lipman-Blumen[6] concluded that an important predictor of a woman's female role ideology was her mother's overall satisfaction with life. Where mothers had been dissatisfied with homemaking, they had a greater tendency to raise daughters with a more liberated view of the role of women. Thus, one could conclude that if a mother prefers to have both a career and a family life, in order to obtain full life satisfaction, she would also communicate these values to her daughters.

As far as boys are concerned, Nadelson and Eisenberg[21] described a little boy who came to his mother to thank her for being a doctor. This came after he had had a conversation with a friend whose mother did not work and who, as the friend described her, 'yells and hollers at me and talks on the telephone all day'. Perhaps this is an extreme example, but there seems to be a moral to the story!

How can organizations overcome the remaining problems?

From the introductory section of this article, it seems clear that organizations have cause for uncertainty about integrating women into the organization on a more permanent basis. However, there is also evidence that an increasing number of women have proved to be competent and willing to shoulder the consequences of a career. Even their family life need not suffer on account of their occupational responsibilities. Of course, some organizations in South Africa have discovered these facts and they are making full use of the available womanpower, on the same basis as the available manpower. For the sake of those who are not doing so, it seems necessary to look for ways of overcoming the remaining barriers.

Personnel selection

In selecting personnel it would be necessary to consider the kind of information collected. It does not really make sense to ask a woman whether she plans to have more children or not. What is important is to look at her occupational background. Is there continuous labour force participation? What would she like to achieve in future and what did she do until now to enhance her career? What opportunities has she had to enhance her career?

Another area to investigate is the family background. What were her parents' attitudes towards working women? What were her mother's attitudes towards the homemaker role? How close was she to her parents and can she function more independently? An incomplete sentences blank could be a useful instrument for collecting this kind of information but in some situations a semi-structured interview by a skilled interviewer (perhaps a woman too), would be required.

Sex-role conflict is another factor. Is this woman applying for a traditional female job or does she want to get involved in a male dominated career? If it is the latter, one should investigate to what extent she experiences sex-role conflict and what inner resources she has for coping. Perhaps of equal importance is the question of external resources to provide support when conflict in the male dominated area threatens. Information about her husband and her family becomes necessary in this context. However, the personnel manager should also consider from the same point of view, the organizational environment into which she will be moving. Possibly the personnel department itself could provide a certain amount of support.

There are only a few guidelines. Literature such as that cited in this article could suggest other criteria for personnel selection. Depending on the position to be filled, it may also be a good idea to interview the husband of the female applicant. This, however, should not be done in such a manner that it appears to be discriminatory. (It may be good policy to interview wives of male applicants as well!)

Assessment centres

The assessment centre approach could be used for developing new, as well as existing staff within the organization. Hart and Thompson[24] provided a detailed blueprint on how an assessment centre should be used for career development within the organization, rather than for personnel selection only. Career development workshops can be conducted, where managers and potential managers can improve their interpersonal skills and discover their strengths and weaknesses.

Martha Rader[25] described a management development programme for women. In her evaluation of the programme it became clear that participants for such a programme should be selected in terms of their attitudes regarding women, their age, and level of education, as well as the kind of positions in which these women would be employed, that is 'traditional' female or 'pioneer' positions. Obviously, the programme must also be appropriate to the group.

Aspects that could be included in such a programme are: assertiveness, improvement of the self-concept, communication processes, career planning within the organization, and management skills. Each group would have their own needs and workshops should be planned accordingly, within the framework of the organization.

Child-care facilities

The last barrier between a career committed woman and the organization could be the availability of child-care facilities. Adequate facilities will lower the rate of absenteeism and improve the performance of female

staff. Many women are willing to pay well for good facilities for their children, so that it is not necessary for the organization to provide these facilities free of charge. Non-profit nursery schools and day-care centres could be run at fairly low cost to the organization. The quality of the facilities, however, should be high to ensure that employees use them and that employees feel it worth their expenditure.

Conclusion

The problems involved in integrating women on a more permanent level into organizations have been considered. Organizations must see women employees as a profitable investment before time and money will be spent on their training and development. Women, on the other hand, are left with the responsibility to convince organizations that they could be just as committed to their careers as their male counterparts before they can expect organizations to treat them equally.

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