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Transforming Organisations: Management Cultures, Women and Leadership in South Africa

Introduction

There are countless fundamental obstacles to the full participation of women in development, and decision-making. Amongst these are increasing poverty, low rates of literacy partly due to factors which mitigate against access to educational institutions and facilities, a lack of access to basic social services, particularly health care and the fact that women are the targets of physical, sexual and psychological abuse. Recently, there has been much focus on women and empowerment, both in South Africa and internationally. A number of recent documents, such as the Women's Charter for Effective Equality (1993), the Interim Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1993), The National Report of the Status of Women in South Africa prepared for the World Conference on Women held in Beijing in September 1995, the Reconstruction and Development Programme (1994), the Vienna Declaration and Platform for Action from the International Conference on Human Rights (1993), the Cairo Declaration and Platform for Action from the International Conference on Population and Development (1994), Commitment 5 of the Platform for Action of the World Summit for Social Development held in Copenhagen (1995), the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women which was ratified by the Government of National Unity on 15 December 1995, the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in September 1995, South African Women on the Road to Development, Equality and Peace, Beijing Conference Plan of Action, 1995, illustrate this point.

This paper is concerned with the question of advancing women in leadership, particularly in management. As such, it focuses on one site of inequality for women, that of women in organisational leadership. It starts from the position that women, particularly Black women in South Africa are underrepresented in senior positions within public and corporate spheres.

While South Africa has over a hundred women in Parliament (one of the highest percentages of parliamentarians in the world) women continue to be vastly underrepresented in decision-making structures in both public and private sectors. For example, in 1994, women made up 16% of the uniformed personnel of the South African National Defence Force and 36% of the civilian force (Dept of Welfare, 1996). It is interesting to note that 93% of the female uniformed personnel and 56% of the female civilian personnel were white.

Secondly, a survey of 100 corporate sector companies in South Africa in 1990 found that women comprised 36.6% of the workforce. Of this figure, only 13% were in management (Wintour 1991). A close investigation of one major corporation revealed the following profile:

	White Males	White Female	Black Male	Black Female
Senior Management	199 (98%)	3 (1.5%)	1 (0.5%)	0
Middle Management	1,919 (93.5%)	103 (5%)	20 (1%)	3 (0.5%)

Figure 1 - A breakdown of the management structure of ESKOM by race and gender (Wintour 1991:22).

It is clear that at the managerial and executive level in business, women are markedly few. Of the 23,817 chief executives, general managers and company directors, 26 were African women, 19 Indian women, 49 coloured, 1,307 white women. There were 114 African men, and 21,338 white men. (Manpower Survey: 1989, Occupational Information).

Unsurprisingly, this situation has led to calls to “eliminate occupational segregation, especially by promoting the equal participation of women in highly skilled jobs and senior management positions” (Beijing Conference Plan of Action 1995: 27).

One way in which this has been attempted is to ensure that gender considerations are mainstreamed in policies and programmes of public and private corporations. To this end, the Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) working group (1996) have developed a document “Mainstreaming gender considerations in policies and programmes.”

The document itself marks a number of interesting developments in the consideration of women in South Africa. First, there is an emphasis on *gender* rather than *women* based on the argument that women cannot be understood by looking at women alone. It argues that there needs to be a fuller understanding of the integral relationship between men and women in South African society, and in particular the intersection of gender inequality with those of race and class. In this respect there is a recognition that factors such as race, class, age, geographic location, disability and sexual orientation interact to produce inequalities between groups of women. The result of such inequalities between women is differential access to resources and benefits. CEDAW thus argues that a National Policy for gender equality will need to reflect one of the resolutions of the Beijing Conference to “respect and value the full diversity of women’s situations and recognise that some women face particular barriers to their empowerment” (Beijing Conference Plan of Action).

Second, the main thrust of the document is its emphasis to set in place a “National Machinery” to integrate gender into all projects and programmes of the government. The aim is to “mainstream gender within government and civil society by the transformation of the institutions, policies, procedures, consultative process, budgetary allocation and priorities of all branches of government” (8).

This would appear to constitute a shift from the conceptualisation of women with the context of the National Liberation Struggle where national unity was the priority and gender concerns were considered to be of secondary importance. Then, the development of policies and programmes “added” gender as something of an “afterthought” (Mitchell: 1996).

These developments in their own right are exciting and important but I would argue here that it is necessary to examine more closely the mechanics of transforming cultural practices that mitigate against the advance of women in society. In order to do this I will look more closely at one sphere where women are disadvantaged — organisational management and leadership. The paper is organised as follows:

First, it attempts to make a contribution to the development of a theoretical framework which deepens our understanding of women in organisations and which has implications for policy change. It illustrates the nature of the debate on “same” and “different” with regards to women and argues for a multi-faceted approach to exploring gender in relation to race and class.

Second, the paper explores the nature of organisations. It argues that subcultures and informal networks and hierarchies operate in both public and private sector organisations and these impede the development of women as leaders and managers.

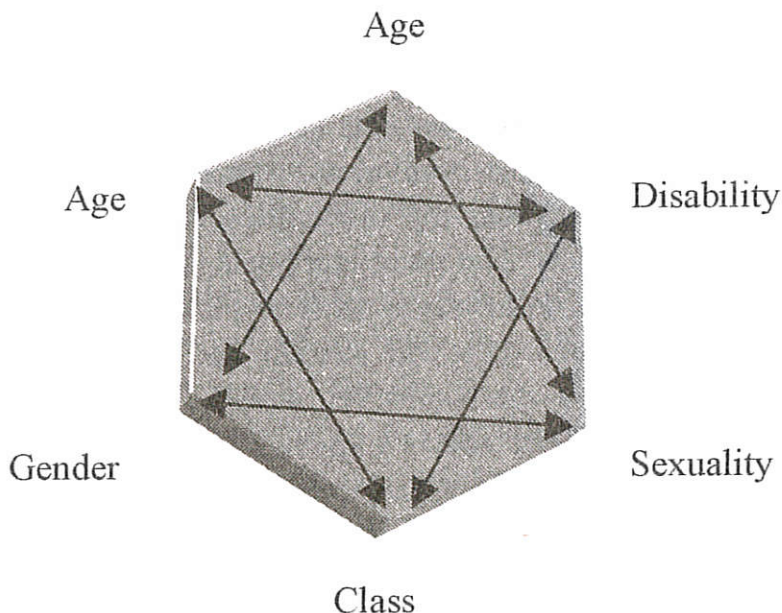
Third, the paper reviews strategies for developing women as managers and leaders. It looks at a range of management development programmes currently offered to women in leadership positions in the public sector and those aimed at increasing the knowledge, skills and competencies of women as managers in private sector organisations.

1. Women, social divisions and social identities

Most studies of organisational restructuring are limited by their failure to take into account gender, race or other social relations in the

development of explanations for change. In South Africa, it is widely recognised that there is a need for an analysis which incorporates the intersection of gender with race and class (Mitchell: 1996). Theories of change in which categories of woman are fixed and which disregard the unequal power relations between for example rural women and men as well as differences between women are limited in their analysis. A more complex and multifaceted approach is required. Such an account of gender relations should recognise the difference between men and women or amongst women based on race and class are not permanent or uniform, but shifting and uneven. They must be seen as defined by the subjects themselves as well as shaped by the social, cultural and material conditions around them.

A useful analytical framework is proposed by Newman and Williams (1995). Although the framework is aimed at analysing the relationship between race, class and gender in the social welfare system in Britain, it is highly applicable in aiding our understanding of social divisions and social identities of women in organisations. The framework, which is represented in figure 2 below, proposes that race, gender and class are both separate and interconnected and there exists myriad forms of identity, difference and inequality, in particular, disability, age and sexuality, the significance of which changes over time.



The model can be viewed simply as a series of axes which represent different social relations of power. A more dynamic interpretation however is to look at the figure as a three dimensional polyhedron which reflects different and changing experiences. Viewed in this way, the model suggests that “social divisions impact upon people, singly or in groups, in different ways, at different times, in different situations” (Newman and Williams, 1995:118). Second, the figure highlights how different forms of power and oppression are interrelated. According to Newman and Williams, “race, class and gender have a compounding effect on the experiences and life changes of black, working class women. Similarly the class position, as well as the age, ‘race’ and sexuality of a disabled man will affect the nature of the support he receives” (1995:118).

Newman and Williams argue further that the model does not suggest an evenly distributed or balanced terrain. It is seen as prismatic rather than fixed and will reflect different patterns over time. This suggests that some lines of interaction will assume greater salience at different historical junctures. In this way, the model offers a way of seeing diversity as a series of interrelationships, rather than as a group of separate categories.

This model is useful for helping us understand organisations. In the past in South Africa, there has been a preoccupation with class relations in the sociology of work and occupations. Now that gender has entered the debate on the social relations in the workplace, class seems to have disappeared. Much has been written about women and leadership, most of which emphasises the difficulties which women face in getting managerial positions. The main emphasis is more often than not on differences in pay and conditions of service, status and access to jobs, thus the issues of difference between women and men have been the main focus of analysis. Newman and Williams (1995) argue that it is important to recognise the successes achieved in drawing comparisons between the working conditions, experiences and opportunities of women and men but that it would be dangerous to limit the analysis of gender simply to these issues. What is important, particularly in South Africa, is to recognise that differences between women exist. Organisa-

tional transformation and restructuring aimed at advancing the leadership of women needs to recognise this as an issue.

In much of the women studies literature, women have tended to be regarded as a universal category, defined by their exclusion from the mainstream. An analysis of “same” and “difference” has been difficult, partly due to the ways in which studies of gender are organised around “male” and “female,” “women” and “men” as oppositional categories rather than as facets of real and complex identities. This is partly due to the fact that much of the analysis of the position of women derives from an understanding of identity based on ‘essential’ or ‘fixed’ categories constructed from given attributes. In this analysis it is assumed that women will all act the same under all conditions. Thus, there is need for a more sensitive methodology to help us in our analysis. Any analysis of women and gender relations needs to build on a methodology which allows women to construct themselves as well as recognise that their lives and social identities are constructed by the social, cultural and material conditions around them. According to Williams and Newman:

to understand gender dynamics of organisations, we need to build theory out of women’s actual experiences of organisational life. Perspectives which foreground diversity can enable us to explore ambiguities and tensions in women’s roles and identities within a particular, gendered, cultural configuration. At one moment, a black woman may define herself as a professional or manager; at another as a trade unionist; at another as a member of a women’s group or network. Some experiences (such as racial harassment) will foreground her identity as black; others, (such as lack of access to childcare) as a woman. It is the relationship between these different elements of identity that constitute women’s experience. If we want to understand that experience, we have to take on the complexity of issues of identity.

In attempting to understand identity, it is worth examining the applicability of the concept of re-framing the narrative. This concept is becoming an essential part of the disciplines of psychology, anthropology, gender studies. Re-framing the narrative constitutes a shift from representational to ontological narrativity (Somers and Gibson, 1994). Thus, instead of being constructed or represented on categories of false universality and exclusion, something more substantive is being

postulated about narrative, namely that social life is itself storied and that narrative is an ontological condition of social life. Women can construct identities (however multiple and changing) by locating themselves in or being located within a repertoire of emplotted stories.

Thus it would seem that in South Africa, the development of policy for mainstreaming gender concerns in organisational development needs to draw on a theory of gender which is multifaceted and which recognises diversity as complex rather than simple and as shifting rather than static.

We turn next to examining more closely the nature of organisations, particularly the dynamics of organisational cultures.

2. Organisational Cultures and Gender Relations

In this section we will explore the dynamics of organisational cultures. An attempt is made to theorise organisational cultures in relation to gender. It is essential first to understand the changing nature of work.

Post-Fordism is used as a term to describe the changing nature of the working environment. It replaces the old hierarchical command structures with an increasingly 'flat' management structure. The vertical chains of command are replaced by horizontal relationships of teamwork and the creation of "multi-skilled" workers who are flexible enough to do complex and integrated work (Cope and Kalantzis, 1995).

A new worklife ushers in the uses of new languages, introduces new technologies and creates new social relations of work.. Where the old Fordist organisation depended upon clear, precise and formal systems of command, new organisations assume a more transformational culture which suggests flat, rather than hierarchical structures. Despite these changes, post-Fordist organisations have reproduced the informal networks of old corporate cultures. Thus while the structure of the post-Fordist organisation appears to promote advancement, women still need to negotiate the language of the mainstream, albeit a new

language. Recent evidence would suggest that it is even harder for women to get into the networks that operate informally than it was to enter discourses of formality. This is a crucial factor in producing the phenomenon of the glass ceiling — the point at which employment and promotion opportunities come to an abrupt stop.

The starting point of the argument is that we need to be concerned with the dynamics of changing organisational cultures, structures and perceptions, both internal and in the wider social context where organisations are situated. Aligned to this is the need to understand the relationship between gender and organisational cultures.

According to Newman (1995), organisations have cultures which are usually defined in terms of shared symbols, languages, practices (how we do things here) and deeply embedded beliefs and values. Organisational cultures are “gendered” and give rise to and sustain gendered meanings, identities, practices and power relations.

Organisational cultures have been identified as significant barriers to change, even in those organisations where equal opportunity initiatives have been developed. Here the informal organisation may continue to transmit cultural images about the “proper place” for women. Gender hierarchies may be sustained and reproduced through cultural images about the value of women labour.

Newman identifies three cultural forms. These are traditional cultures, competitive cultures and transformational cultures.

According to Newman, traditional cultures are based on a mix of administrative and professional identities, each with their own language, imagery and value relationships and ways of doing things. Through these discourses particular identities are constructed. Administrative identities are functionally structured, such as “finance” or “personnel.” Within these, there is a hierarchy of clearly defined grades and status positions. Professional identities, on the other hand, are tied to the profession itself, for example doctor or social worker.

Gender is constructed within these cultures in two ways. Hierarchically, with women, often at lower grades and tiers, and through the definition of jobs as 'women's work' and "men's work" (across both horizontal and vertical divisions). It is obvious in South Africa, as elsewhere, that women have traditionally occupied functional specialisms (personnel) or service professions (nursing, social work) most closely associated with female roles.

Such gender typing in jobs has meant that women are often found in senior positions in such settings. This notwithstanding, there has always been an invisible hierarchy operating between sectors, with male dominated sectors more advantaged in terms of pay and status.

According to Newman, traditional cultures therefore have been based on sexual divisions of labour, reflecting traditional views about appropriate male — female roles. She argues further that the gendered basis of this culture goes far beyond the sexual division of labour. "It builds on sets of gendered and sexualised meanings operating in the workplace which sets up the invisible hierarchies between male and female roles" (1995 ; 16). Women's roles in organisations are often quasi-familial, such as "mother," "aunt," "wives." A few women are admitted to the ranks of the lads — they are "tomboy" or "fun loving sister." Class, race and generation underpin the organisation of female roles in traditional public sector organisations.

Newman illustrates the emergence of competitive cultures in organisations. Such cultures are increasingly widespread in private, corporate sector organisations but are still rare in public sector organisations in South Africa. These cultures emulate the 'hard sell' of the market place. Newman describes this as the culture of machismo. Power shifts to the centre of activity, where people do business. According to Newman, informal hierarchies are forged around jobs which are considered to be the most "sexy," particularly those linked to a rampaging entrepreneurialism. In such organisations, there exists a heterosexual culture where there is a potential equivalence between men and women roles, but, equivalence depends on women taking roles which compete with men and other women, in a battle for resources and jobs. For women to be successful in such organisations, they need to gain access

to informal networks and “clubs” which are controlled by men who jealously guard their power base. This is a culture of “machismo” and women who succeed are likely to be scorned by both men and women.

In this scenario, the traditional culture is of course not replaced entirely. It informs the hidden domain of gender relations. Women have to live out the contradictions between these cultures.

Transformational cultures, according to Newman, are based on the notion of a new “managerialism.” It is a model which emphasises cultural change and new ways of doing things. It values human resources and aims at empowering lower level staff and it seems to offer women the opportunity to become active partners in the reshaping of cultures and the delivery of new styles of interface between it and its clients.

There are however potential problems for women in these cultures. First, they are gender and racially “blind.” To acknowledge difference (beyond respecting individuality or the uniqueness of each individual) would be to undermine the consensual values which are seen as essential. The dominant notion of equality is based on the liberal notion of fair access and is illusory rather than real. The gender and racial inequalities of power which operate beneath the surface of seemingly consensual teams remain. Women again operate with a contradictory set of meanings.

Itzin (1995) confirms through her research into local authorities that a ‘gender culture’ exists. The challenge however is to move from an understanding of the gender dynamics of an organisation to a strategy for change.

Shifting patterns of culture means that strategies for change have to be reshaped continually.

Cox (1991) traces the cultural transformation in organisations through five stages to what she calls a multicultural organisation. Applying this five stage model to South Africa, one might conclude that

in the days of apartheid, industrially-based organisations essentially excluded most women but particularly Black women. Thus the first stage of the organisation is unawareness or exclusion, based partially on false notions about women — for example that women are “emotional” and thus cannot shoulder responsibility. Organisations slowly began to open up mainly in response to growing liberal feminist movement. Women, mostly white were allowed access to middle and some senior level positions. Black women were still excluded on the basis of race and “construction” of their social identities. White women challenged white men for power by being more like them but still found it difficult to gain upward mobility. At stage three organisation may begin to put in place support systems for women. Implicit in this is that women are deficient. At this stage the glass ceiling is identified. In stage four the organisational emphasis is on mainstreaming and inclusion of women owing to the recognition of the structural exclusion evident of stage three. Diversity issues become less of a compliance response and become linked to good business by focusing on increasingly diverse market. Black women become integrated to some extent and could as a result become empowered to negotiate for a greater understanding and response. The organisation may gain the benefits of a diverse population but at the expense of a previously entitled group. Many organisations in South Africa are currently stuck here and need to confront the contradiction between the expressed value of diversity and their failure to empower black and white women. For organisations prepared to engage and who value diversity, structural integration can occur. To reach stage five, organisations need to embrace informal networks. According to Cox, the multicultural organisation at stage five looks and thinks and acts differently. Integration occurs, yet no group is excluded as a result of this shift.

For organisations to advance to the latent stages of development suggested by Cox, there is need for wide scale management development programmes. The following section will explore this in more detail.

3. Strategies for transforming organisations

This section is concerned with strategies for organisational change.

In both public and private sector organisations the need for management development and leadership training is well established (Mitchell 1996). However, in developing programmes it is important that they take account of actual rather than assumed training needs. Mainiero (cited in Larwood and Wood 1995) suggests that senior women in leadership positions are best placed to suggest training needs. She posits that such women would themselves have passed through four stages of "political maturation." These are "political *naivete*" to "building credibility" and "refining a style" to "shouldering responsibilities." Such women who may have experienced all of these stages would seem to be in a unique position to suggest the needs for training they now see as critical.

Although there is a wide literature on types of management development and leadership training programmes for the private and corporate sectors, not much has been written about the specific training for women bureaucrats. Some research points to the importance of paying attention to the gender dimensions of public administration and argues for the need to explain the consistent failure to "integrate" women in development policy and practice (Goetz 1992). Goetz further highlights the role of public administration in reproducing women's marginality.

Kabbeer (1992) suggests that there is an important need for gender training in bureaucracies. A useful illustration of how this might be achieved is contained in a study of the Royal Institute of Public Administration (RIPA) management development for women programme (Williams and Macalpine 1995). The programme takes place in London over three months of full time study and involves women from Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nigeria, Tanzania, the Yeman, Sudan and Nepal. The focus of the programme is on women civil servants as agents of change in the development process. It is concerned with the con-

straints and opportunities available to women bureaucrats in development administrations.

The RIPA programme brings together analysis and insights from work on gender and management and gender in development. The aim is to increase women's access to and control over resources.

A multitude of management development programmes exist in the Private and Corporate Sector. Larwood and Wood (1995) describe three main forms of management training.

- (i) programmes in career development and management skills directly assisting women to understand the demands on them if they are to become successful managers.
- (ii) programmes assisting both men and women personnel in adjusting to a new understanding of more egalitarian gender roles and culture,
- (iii) programmes seeking to train human resource officers and other organisational decision makers to cope with the specific demands placed upon them by new regulations, a changing workforce and increasing recognition that firms must learn to foster a sense of inclusion if they are to make best use of their human resources.

There is little doubt that management development programmes that target women are crucial in developing leadership. They do, however, require a great deal of resources and it is important to know which programmes are likely to succeed. A vast amount of research into the effectiveness of management development programmes exists in both North America and the UK. A recent study by Lewis and Fagenson 1995 considers the effectiveness of three types of management development programmes

- (i) women only management training programmes
- (ii) management training for men and women
- (iii) mentoring programmes

Women only training programmes seem to impart some knowledge and skills to women managers and provide a supportive environment for participants. The disadvantage is that they seem to exclude and isolate

women further in male dominated management ranks. The exclusion of men weakens the possibility of gender integration in management roles.

Management training for women and men increases leadership skills and knowledge amongst both women and men as intended. These programmes have clear advantages without any notable disadvantages. Research has shown that these programmes have a significant impact on skill development and on fundamental management competencies which arise from integrating women into the mainstream of managerial candidates. According to Lewis and Fagenson, one danger may be that such programmes artificially heighten the expectation amongst women for a direct and immediate link between their increased participation in mixed sexed management training programmes and their advancement into and through the ranks of management, especially the higher levels of management.

The usefulness of mentors in advancing the careers of aspirant women managers and leaders has been well documented. The problem in most organisations is that it is often difficult to find mentors. Many organisational cultures are not conducive to informal mentoring relationships. Some writers argue that women have an increasingly difficult task finding mentors because of the prejudice aimed at denying them access to influential powerbases and information networks. There is, however, a contrasting view that women secure mentors as often as men. Because of the difficulties surrounding informal mentoring opportunities, many organisations have established formal mentoring programmes. The effectiveness of corporate mentoring programmes is well documented, many of which highlight its success in acculturating women and minorities into organisational leadership positions. Variations of mentoring programmes exist. A programme organised in one American corporation (Lewis and Fagenson, 1991) is based on "mentoring circles" as opposed to one-to-one relationships. These circles typically consist of six to ten proteges and two to four upper level mentors.

Research shows that informal mentoring relationships increase women's advancement into and through the ranks of management. The

extent to which formal mentoring programmes achieve a similar outcome has been the subject of extensive empirical investigation. Most research finds that formal mentoring programmes are successful in building leadership and other technical and political skills for women. It has been found that formal mentoring programmes have encountered problems not found in informal mentoring relationships. Formal relationships tend to have a narrower work-specific focus, while informal mentoring programmes extend to psycho-social support. It would seem that mentoring programmes can effect positive outcomes for women aspiring to leadership and management positions.

Conclusions

The paper argued that it will take more than legislation to advance black women into management and leadership positions South Africa. Both public and private sector organisations need to address “gendered” organisational cultures. There is need to put in place a coherent, strategic programme of organisational development aimed at increasing both the number and quality of women leaders.

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